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SERMONS

BEARING CHIEFLY ON THE TWO COMINGS OF

OUR LORD

By H. P. LIDDON, D.D., D.C.L.

CANON AND CHANCELLOR OF ST. PAUL'S

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. I.

Nox præcessit: dies autem appropinquavit. Alleluia

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PREFACE.

When, three years ago, the author published some sermons preached in St. Paul's during the Easter Season, it was suggested that something of the same kind might be attempted for other portions of the Christian year.

The present publication, accordingly, is devoted to the two great truths which the Church of Christ proposes for our consideration during Advent; our Lord's First Coming among men as the Son of a Virgin-Mother, and His Second Coming in the clouds of heaven to judge the living and the dead. A third volume should follow, consecrated to the festival of Christmas and to the close of the civil year.

In these two volumes there has been no attempt to arrange the sermons on any other principle than that of the order in which they were preached. Their chance of usefulness lies in their association

with the memories and lives of some of those who listened to them; and such persons will be better able to recognize words which they may desire to remember, if the chronological order of their utterance is observed. It has been impossible to avoid a certain amount of repetition of thought, phrases, and quotations, when dealing with the same topics, and in some cases with the same passages of Holy Scripture; nor has the author thought it well to avoid this repetition by the expedient of ignoring the guidance of the Church in her services at sacred seasons of the Christian year, in order to discuss some subject of modern interest. The sermons preached during Advent in the year 1880 have been omitted, as having been published in a separate form.[a]

It is right, further, to state that some of these sermons would not have been published had the question of their publication been an open one. As a matter of fact, they have all appeared in newspapers, or periodicals, or volumes, in this

[a] *Thoughts on Present Church Troubles*, 1882, 2nd edit.

country or in America; but in all cases also without the author's revision or sanction. In these versions the sermons bear titles which he did not furnish, and which often appear to him to be inappropriate, while, as was perhaps inevitable, they contain many, and in some cases grave, inaccuracies. The author takes this opportunity of answering a great many questions by saying that he cannot hold himself responsible for the text of any sermon of his which does not bear the name of his present publishers.

A Christian knows that he passes his earthly life between two momentous facts. Behind him is the Incarnation. Before him is the Judgment. As he looks backward, the Incarnation, ever present with him in its effects, must appear to him to be incomparably the greatest event in the past history of our race. As he looks forward, he is well aware that nothing can possibly happen which will rival in its overwhelming significance, the Second Coming of our Lord.

Of late years, through God's grace, the Incar-

nation of His Blessed Son has come to fill a larger and larger place in the thoughts and lives of faithful Churchmen. But that the Second Coming of our Lord to judgment is too much lost sight of in our busy day, will scarcely be denied. Dr. Pusey often would say, "How surprised people will be when all that we see comes to an end in the way we know it will!" And his relative, the late Lord Shaftesbury,—a man ever to be held in honour for the unwearied beneficence of his life,—was of one mind with Dr. Pusey in insisting on the importance of this solemn truth, and on the common danger of forgetting it. If any sentences in these volumes should lead their readers to prepare more earnestly for the eternal future, the object of their publication will have been well attained.

3, Amen Court,
St. Bartholomew's Day, 1888.

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SERMON I.

ELEMENTS OF A RELIGIOUS MOVEMENT.

(FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT.)

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And when He was come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, Who is this?

IT is natural to ask why the account of Christ's entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday should be read as the Gospel for Advent Sunday. At first sight it looks like a misapplication of the Evangelical history. In Advent we are thinking of the two extreme points, if we may so term them, of our Lord's relationship to us; of His coming to take our nature upon Him eighteen centuries and a half ago, and of His coming to judge us hereafter. But lo! we suddenly find ourselves in the very midst of His earthly life—at its very crisis. He has just wrought His greatest recorded miracle, and He is consciously on His way to die. What is the connection, we ask, between this entry into Jerusalem and either of Christ's Advents —whether His past Coming to take our nature upon Him of His Virgin Mother, or His still future Advent in the clouds of heaven as Judge of the quick and dead? Is the connection more than a fanciful one, and might it not have been better, as is the case with other Churches of

Christendom,[a] to have chosen the Gospel for to-day from some passage in which our Lord describes His Second Coming, as He does in the Gospel for next Sunday?

This is, perhaps, what we think. But these old Liturgical arrangements were originally made by people who knew very well what they were about; they have been continued to our day, because they have been found, by the experience of some thirteen or fourteen centuries, to have a deep lesson for the human soul. They are not often interfered with now without loss. It may be questioned whether we are the men to improve upon the works of the great masters of the Christian life; nor do we make the attempt, even on a small scale, in our new lectionaries and revised Prayer-books, without bungling into crude mistakes, which another age will criticize sharply and justly, in the light of an older and deeper mastery of spiritual things. This Gospel has been chosen for to-day because Advent-time brings before us two truths, not one. If we were only thinking of the first Coming of the Divine Saviour into the world, or only of His Coming to judgment, passages of Scripture describing either of those momentous events would have been obviously appropriate. But, to do justice to the solemn time on which we enter to-day, we want to keep the two truths clearly before the eye of the soul. And, therefore, here we have a history in which they meet; a repetition, as it were, of our Lord's first coming to His own, when His own received Him not;[b] an anticipation of His coming to judgment, "when every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him."[c]

For His entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday was

[a] In the Roman Missal the Gospel for the First Sunday in Advent is St. Luke xxi. 25–33, which is used in the English Prayer-book on the following Sunday. The Prayer-book follows the Sarum Missal.

[b] St. John i. 11. [c] Rev. i. 7.

certainly an act of grace. It was a last opportunity of embracing the Gospel, of learning Who and what He was, and what He had to teach, and what He, and He alone, could do for those who would listen to Him to any real purpose. The offer which He made to His countrymen at large, by being born of a Jewish mother and under the Law;[a] the offer which He made and makes to all mankind, by taking our nature upon Him[b] and coming among us as one of ourselves;—this offer He repeats on a smaller scale, but, if we may so put it, in an intenser way, by this entry into Jerusalem. His entry was indeed a day of grace to the otherwise doomed city; a last but supreme opportunity, on which previous errors, perversenesses, cruelties, might be redressed by a free acceptance and pardon. It was to Jerusalem what the dawn of the Nativity was to mankind at large; it was a day of grace, in which God's Blessed Son showed the light of His countenance,[c] and was merciful to the people of His ancient choice. If it was a day of grace, it was also a day of judgment. Judgment means originally, in the sacred language, separation; separation is the first step in judgment. It is so in the things of this world. To decide on relative degrees of merit is, from the necessity of the case, to separate this man from that, this class from that. To criticize in art or in literature is to say that this or that statue, or painting, or book belongs to this or that degree of excellence or of demerit. To award prizes in a school is to separate between those who gain and those who lose them. To deliver a verdict in a court of justice is to distinguish between innocence and guilt. Separation is the very first step in any process of judgment; and separation was the order of the day when our Lord entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. He seemed to be, or to be about to be,

[a] Gal. iv. 4. [b] Phil. ii. 7. [c] Ps. iv. 6.

on His trial; but in reality He was Judge, and His seeming judges were in the dock before His tribunal. They it was who were, of their own free will and motion, separating themselves at His approach into opposite classes; taking their sides almost involuntarily, and so writing themselves down in the Eternal Book as His enemies or His worshippers. It was, in very truth, a day of judgment; only the Judge was not in His robes, and the parties before Him had for the minute scrambled on to the material seat of judgment, and were apparently "they that ought to speak."[a]

The point, however, upon which St. Matthew insists, is that when Christ entered Jerusalem "all" the city was moved. He says "all the city." It can have been no ordinary occasion which produced this effect. It is comparatively easy to interest a single class, a profession, a coterie of thinkers, a political party. Local interests will move those who live in particular districts; mercantile interests those who are engaged in particular lines of business; literary interests those who are devoted to special departments of study; political interests those who are engaged in public life, or have devoted time and thought to the mastery of public questions. But what is the sort of interest that can move all ages, all classes, all characters, in a great and varied community? Certainly we may witness something of the kind when a great sorrow, such as the death of a popular prince or minister, or a great loss, such as defeat in war, or a deadly pestilence, or a famine, or revolutionary violence, or a vast conflagration, falls upon a country or a capital. But, even in these rare cases, the interest is distributed unequally; the loss, or sense of loss, falls with a very varying weight of incidence on different classes: there are always some who have not much to

[a] Ps. xii. 4.

lose, or who do not feel much, and who are at least tranquil amid the prevailing agitation. That which moves a whole community to its depths, is that which touches man as man; not man as a capitalist, not man as a citizen or a subject, not man as belonging to this class or to that, but man as a being who has a consciousness of his mighty destiny; who knows that he is here for a few years and upon trial; who feels the solemnity, the pressure, of life in his soul and conscience; who has a perpetual presentiment of coming death and of the world beyond it.

When Jesus entered Jerusalem all were moved, because Jesus, by His very Presence and bearing, spoke to the souls of all. The power of His Presence was felt in very different ways, but universally. But the movement which it occasioned was very far indeed from being always a movement in the right direction. Truth is too strong to be without effect. But it repels when it does not attract: it exacts either the homage of love or—at least as a rule—the homage of animosity. The remarkable thing in Jerusalem was that, according to St. Matthew, there was no class of persons who were or professed to be indifferent. We know how large a body of persons in different classes of society make this profession in London. They profess really not to care about Religion; they stand outside it with folded arms, or they occupy themselves with other matters, letting those who have a religious taste follow it as they please. Whether at bottom they are really indifferent; whether such a thing as *bonâ fide* indifference towards religion is possible—may very well be questioned. It is, of course, possible to be unconcerned in a subject the claims of which have never really been brought before you; but when this has been done, the profession of indifference is generally the veil of a scarcely disguised opposition. Jerusalem, at any rate, was small enough in

point of population for every one to know something about the significance of Christ's entry, and we may without difficulty catalogue the elements of which the movement which it created was made up.

I.

First of all, we may take it for granted that a main element in the general excitement would have been curiosity. Crowds of Galilæan pilgrims to the great festival were arriving in their caravans, day by day, with reports of the beneficent miracles of Jesus, of the startling nature of His teaching, of the vast influence which He had exerted among the simple, straightforward people of the northern province. "Jesus the Prophet of Nazareth of Galilee"[a] was already a name known more or less to every inhabitant of Palestine who took any interest whatever in questions of the day; and there were, as was to be expected, wild stories afloat, such as gather round every distinguished man—stories which are produced by, and which stimulate, the general interest. Nor was Jesus unknown in Jerusalem itself. Only in the preceding September, at the Feast of Tabernacles, He had worked a miracle on a man born blind, which had become the subject of a special and strict investigation before a committee of the Great Council, or Sanhedrin;[b] and this inquiry had notoriously failed to shake the evidence of the person who had been its subject. After a short journey into Galilee, He had again appeared in Jerusalem at the end of December, during the Feast of the Dedication of the Temple, when an attempt had been made on His life, in consequence of His clear assertion of a claim to be a Divine Person.[c] But since that date an event

[a] St. Matt. xxi. 11. [b] St. John ix. 13–16. [c] *Ib.* x. 31.

had occurred which had raised the feeling of the capital to the highest pitch of excitement. At the village of Bethany, not quite three quarters of an hour's walk from the city gate, and only just hidden by a spur of the hill known as the Mount of Olives, Jesus had raised from the dead, nay, from the very putrefaction of the tomb, the body of Lazarus, who belonged to a well-known family in the place.[a] This miracle had excited great attention; and when, six days before the Passover, on His return to Bethany, Jesus, as it would seem, by way of acknowledgment, was entertained by the villagers at the house of Simon the Leper, St. John says that a large number of Jews came out from the city expressly to see Lazarus, who was present at this entertainment. Lazarus had returned to his family, not from a distant colony, but from that other mysterious world, of which in this life we can know so little while we long to know so much. "Much people of the Jews therefore knew that he was there: and they came not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might see Lazarus also, whom He had raised from the dead."[b]

Much of the interest which is felt on the subject of religion in all ages belongs, in one way or another, to the impulse of curiosity. If a man is moderately intelligent; if he is alive to the nature and strength of the influences which, whether rightly or wrongly, do as a matter of fact govern numbers of human lives, he must feel that religion is a subject well worth careful attention. He may himself know, at least practically, little or nothing about it. He may be wanting in the moral and spiritual sympathies which alone enable us to understand what it is in itself as at once the purest passion and the highest virtue of which man is capable. And yet, if he have only, in ever

[a] St. John xi. 43, 44. [b] xii. 9.

so little a degree, the eye of a statesman, he must see that it is a mighty power swaying the minds, and purifying and strengthening the affections, and invigorating the wills of millions of men, and that as such it is a most worthy subject for careful inquiry. At this very day, read the newspapers, or listen to the ordinary run of conversation, and consider how much of current interest in religion is this interest of curiosity. Why religious people act as they do; what it is that impels them; how they have come to cherish such convictions; who are the persons, and what the books and opinions and states of feeling, which most influence them now;—all this moves the curiosity of the intelligent world. The world stands outside the Sacred Temple, but it strains its eyesight very hard in order to see as much of the interior as it possibly can through the windows, or the half-open door. If, indeed, Religion is dormant; if the Church is possessed by a spirit of lethargy; public curiosity takes little heed of it, except in the way of an occasional expression of languid contempt. But when life and activity return, there is a change, and that quickly. In George III.'s time the public prints in this country scarcely alluded to religion in any way whatever, except as a sort of decoration of the body politic, which came into view on State occasions. We have but to read the papers of our own day, whatever their principles, to appreciate the change. Jesus has come into the city in the two great religious movements which have taken place during this century. He first reanimated faith in His own precious Atonement for sin, and in the converting and sanctifying work of His Spirit; and then he recalled men to what He had revealed respecting the nature and the constitution of His Body, the Church, and the value of those Sacraments by which we are united to Him. And so for good or

evil, from one motive or another, but very largely from a curious wish to learn what it is all about, "all the city is moved."

II.

A second element in the excitement was assuredly fear. The ruling sect of the Pharisees, which largely, although by no means entirely, influenced the opinions and conduct of the Priesthood, was alarmed at the moral influence of Jesus. They felt that between Him and themselves there was a fundamental opposition; and they instinctively foresaw that, in the long-run, He would be stronger than they. Thus they were quite prepared to persecute Him to the death. They had actually issued a public notice, that information might be given as to His residence, with a view to arresting Him.[a] The Herodians, who viewed the success of Jesus as likely to interfere with their political plans, would have agreed with the Pharisees in fearing the influence of Jesus, though for another reason. Fear, of course, is a form of interest; it tends to be very practical. For irrational fear, if it is armed, soon becomes cruel. Persecution is more frequently the resource of the timid than the counsel of the strong: to persecute is to make a public confession of weakness. In rare cases persecution may succeed, but it can only succeed on the condition of literally exterminating its victims. Still you must take a great interest in any religion in order to persecute it. The Pharisees, who hated the religious teaching of Jesus, and the Herodians, who thought that it would injure their cherished plans for the political future, eyed the entry into Jerusalem with sincere anxiety.

[a] St. John xi. 57.

In all ages this is the case. Is not much of the public interest in religion at the present day dictated by secret fear? Men who are not themselves religious, and who see the vast power of religion upon other minds, do fear religion: just as savages suspect witchcraft in a new scientific apparatus or discovery. Thus it was that the Jews said that our Lord had a devil.[a] Thus it was that St. Paul was accused in Corinth of want of straightforwardness.[b] When men do not understand the real secret of the power which religion exerts over simple and purified hearts, they go about to invent an imaginary one. In truth, they are frightened; and the violence of their language when they have no power, and of their acts when they have, is the measure of their alarm. Still this alarm is undoubtedly a species of interest: it is a protest against the notion that religion is insignificant. And when, as in the first ages, it is taken as a matter of course by the servants of Christ, who are in nothing terrified by their adversaries,[c] this is to such adversaries a manifest "token of perdition," of a virtually ruined cause, while to Christians it is "of salvation, and that," as the Apostle says, "of God."

III.

A third element in the general excitement would have been due to the imitative habit which influences so many people in all ages and countries. They are always anxious to keep pace with the most recent enthusiasm, not because it is the best, but because it is the most recent. They have a stock of sympathy ready in hand to be lavished on any promising eccentricity that may present itself, and that may be sufficiently recognized by

[a] St. John vii. 20. [b] 2 Cor. xii. 16. [c] Phil. i. 28.

persons whom they think of weight. They are sensitively afraid of being behind the age—behind its last phase of opinion or of fashion. They do not originate, but they are always at the disposal of those who do. Jerusalem would have contained many such; indeed, that it must have contained them is plain, if we compare the scene of the great entry with the scene at the foot of the Cross. Many a man must have cried "Crucify!" on the Friday who had cried "Hosanna!" on the previous Sunday; and in each case only because the majority of other people whom he saw about him on those very different days had cried "Hosanna!" or "Crucify!" before him.

Imitative religion is capable of doing a great deal of work upon occasion; it is far better than no interest in religion at all. It may always lead on to something deeper and more solid than itself. But—do not let us mistake—it is not deep. It has no root in the soul; it belongs strictly to the social atmosphere. It will not stand a strain or shock; it dies with the occasion or influence that has provoked it. Like other fashions, it arises and wanes and disappears; and then men who have gone through it imagine that they have made a real trial of religion, and have discovered its weakness, and, as they say, "see through" it, and are entitled to speak on the subject from experience. Alas! they were merely swept away by a current which was too strong for them; they had been using religious language and going through religious acts, and trying, perhaps, to fan themselves into phases of religious feeling, because they were in hard reality being carried down by a strong social tide which swept them before it, and they only did not wish to be wanting to the supposed proprieties of their position. The wonder would be if their interest had lasted; still, while it did last, it was a *bonâ fide* interest, and contri-

buted, perhaps, some real ingredients to this or that movement of the day. What it would be worth on their death-beds, or beyond, is quite another matter.

IV.

These three elements in the movement of Jerusalem on the day of Christ's entry would have implied a fourth. Curiosity on the subject of religion is only aroused when religion has power at the least over some persons. Hostility to religion is only possible when religion is felt to be a real influence in some quarters; shaping principles and habits, and determining lines of conduct. Nor do the imitative care to follow any who are not themselves really moved. So it would have been on the day of the great entry. There was an inner circle around our Lord, consisting of disciples from Galilee, and of some of the inhabitants of the Holy City itself. They had reflected on the miracles which they had witnessed, or of which they had heard. They had opened their understandings to the force and range of Christ's teaching, and their hearts to the beauty of His human character. Putting these things together—the impression made by a faultless Life, by a teaching which carried its own evidence of a superhuman origin, by a series of miracles which ratified the anticipations alike of the understanding and the heart—they believed in Him. Whether their faith was, as yet, as clear and definite as St. John's, when he wrote His Gospel half a century later, or St. Paul's, when he wrote his great Epistles, may very well be questioned. It was a faith in process of growth. But it was strong enough to move social mountains, to excite curiosity, apprehension, imitation, in the masses around. These men were, in point of numbers, by far the weakest, in point

of moral force, by far the strongest of the various elements in the movement of that eventful day. Moral and spiritual strength has no more necessary relation to numbers, than our mental power has to the size of our bodies; it belongs to a different order of being, and acts not seldom as if in an inverse ratio to natural energy. This little company was the heart and centre of all that passed on that eventful day—it was the only permanent element in the general movement. The curious would soon sate their curiosity when Jesus had declared Himself in the Temple. The hostile would gratify their vengeance before the week was over, only to find themselves irrecoverably defeated. The imitative would cease to imitate when imitation became dangerous; and, indeed, during the dark hours of the Passion a cloud would pass over the faith even of the small and devoted band which was bound to the Heart of Jesus. But this would be but temporary; with the morning of the Resurrection their faith would burn more brightly than before. They were the real motive power of the present; they alone had at command the secret of the future. So it was then; so, depend upon it, it is now.

It is, I know, the fashion to treat this sort of language as a kind of conventional rhapsody in which clergymen, from whatever motive, indulge in the pulpit, but in which it is not to be supposed that they will command the assent of the sensible and educated laity, for the simple reason that there is nothing to correspond to their ecstasies in the world of fact. And yet, my brethren, is there nothing? Who of us has not heard within the last week[a] of the death of one of the noblest and greatest of con-

[a] John Coleridge Patteson, Missionary Bishop of the Melanesian Islands, was killed by the natives at Nukapu on the Eve of St. Matthew, Sept. 20, 1871. See his "Life," by C. M. Yonge, 3rd edit., vol. ii. p. 383 Macmillan: 1874.

temporary Englishmen, Bishop Patteson, who perished some two or three months since by a murderous hand in one of the Melanesian Islands of the Pacific? Well do I remember him, two and twenty years ago, in the full flush of youthful manhood, commanding the admiration of his friends by the qualities which win a young man's love most readily—by activity of body as well as activity of mind, by geniality, by large-heartedness, by all that is included in that most inclusive quality — generosity. Well do I remember how it was believed, even then, that beneath that simple, unaffected, unpretending exterior, there were in contemplation deeper and nobler schemes of life than those of ordinary men; although, indeed, he was the last man to make any unnecessary display of his religious convictions—of those "still waters which run deep" in great souls. He went on, apparently, like other people;—and then one day he astonished the world by leaving his college, his home, his great University prospects, on a mission to the South Sea Islanders. Few men of our day had a gift such as his of mastering languages, of mastering the shades and dialects of cognate languages; he knew, it is said, no less than thirty, which were spoken by the islanders to whom he brought the blessings of the Gospel. These languages were not fixed, like the languages of Europe, by a written literature; and, as a consequence, they were in a condition of perpetual unsettlement, changing their forms and words with inconceivable caprice and rapidity at very short intervals of time. Bishop Patteson could follow and note these variations; he not merely learnt these strange tongues, but he kept pace with their wayward eccentricities, not for the sake of any such work itself, but for the sake of the higher work beyond it. He might, indeed, with so rare a capacity, have aspired to almost any philological

chair in the Universities of Europe; and, as it was, the greatest living masters of the science of language, such as Professor Max Müller, were frequently in communication with him, and not a little indebted to him. But he looked beyond any such renown as can be won at a seat of learning; he had higher aims in view. His fine philological tact was strewn, like the garments of the disciples of old, in the path of the advancing Redeemer. He certainly did not fall away from that companionship when it became perilous: he was in the Hall of Judgment; he was at the foot of the Cross. He has reached Jerusalem in good earnest; and at the report of the deed of blood, whereby an early entrance has been opened for him into the Eternal Presence, a thrill runs through the hearts of his fellow-Churchmen and fellow-countrymen; and even "all the city,"—all that part of our languid, easy, indifferent society, which is ever capable of any moral interest—is in some sense moved. As of old, so now, the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church. As we bend in thought over his early grave, we are lifted for the time into a higher atmosphere, where the meaning of life and the meaning of death, as at most an incident which ushers in a new phase of life, are read in other characters than those of our ordinary thoughts.

The beginning of a new period of time will be felt to be a natural occasion for asking ourselves solemn questions; and although we are still a month from the beginning of the secular year, the Church of Christ begins her new year to-day. And to-day we are face to face with the two Comings of Christ. His first Coming is a matter of history. He has been here either in Person, or by His Spirit and His representatives, for nearly nineteen centuries. His second Coming is, as far as the exact date goes, just as much a matter of uncertainty now as it was in the days of

the Apostles; we cannot say, "Lo here! or, lo there!"[a]—to-day or a thousand years hence. We only know that He Whose words shall not pass away has said that He will come,[b] and that, though He tarry, it is our business to wait for Him, since He will surely come, and will not really tarry.[c] The question is, when He does come, whether in death or judgment, will He find us among the hostile, or the curious, or the imitative, or the faithful? What is our relation towards His first Advent and its momentous consequences now? During our few remaining years, or months, or weeks of life, are we to be interested in religion only as we might be interested in any political question of the day? Or are we secretly jealous of it? Or is it a matter of fashion with us, in which we follow a prevailing taste without any strong personal convictions? Or have we found that Jesus Christ is to us what no other is or can be—our one real Instructor in the highest truth; our lawful and indulgent Master, Who has a right to the entire control of our secret wills as well as of our outward actions; our Priest, as well as our Teacher and our King, Whose Death is a sacrifice of unending power, and Whose Blood cleanses from all sin? They who know this live as it were between the two Advents; rejoicing in the graces and blessings of the first, and looking forward, if not without awe, yet certainly without terror, to the second. They it is who accompany Christ in His procession across the ages with festal songs; strewing His path with the best offerings they can make, and waving on high, amid a world which is curious, or angry, or imitative by turns, their palms of victory. One or the other of these we must be; for we have seen something, even to-day, of Jesus Christ. At His entry into any soul all its faculties are moved. At the approach of this Blessed and Awful

[a] St Luke xvii. 21. [b] Rev. iii. 11. [c] Hab. ii. 3.

Visitant, for good or for evil, in homage or in hate, the understanding, the will, the affections, the imagination, are all of them interested; they must, perforce, in the last resort blaspheme, if they do not adore. The religions of curiosity and of imitation soon resolve themselves into one of the two permanent attitudes of the soul towards its highest object—love or aversion. How is it with us? God grant that we may answer that question honestly, at least between this and Christmas; with our eye on the Eternal Son of God lying in the manger; with our eye on the once crucified Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven.

SERMON II.

THE LAST JUDGMENT.

(SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT.)

ST. LUKE XXI. 27.

And then shall they see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.

LAST Sunday we were led by the Gospel for the day to consider the dispositions with which the approach of Jesus Christ is apt to be regarded by the soul of man. To-day's Gospel[a] leads us to consider His second coming to judgment; His second, that is to say, in point of time, but first in the order of spiritual instruction. First, I say, in the order of the soul's knowledge of truth, and for this reason. It is when God's judgments are abroad, when they are presented vividly to the contemplation of men, whether in communities or individually, that the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness.[b] These judgments are to moral righteousness, at least in part, what miracles are to revealed doctrine: they arrest attention first, and next they imply the reality of that to which they call it. This is the true and highest work of great public calamities, of famines and revolutions, as well as of private suffering, disease, and death; they put

[a] Second Sunday in Advent. [b] Isa. xxvi. 9.

us out of heart with that which meets the eye, and bid us plant our foot on some rock beyond the shifting sands of time. And especially when the last and most awful of the Divine Judgments is seriously pondered over, men are ready and willing to do this; to take a *bonâ fide* and honest survey of their own actual condition before God, and then to consider how the mighty future may be prepared for, by those who live in the Kingdom of the Incarnation; now that the kindness and love of God towards man hath appeared, and not by natural works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy, He hath saved us.[a] Thus, in the order of spiritual enlightenment, the study of the Second Advent prepares us for that of the First; the day of the Great Account educates us to appreciate the treasures of love and power which centre in the Manger of Bethlehem.

I.

When our Lord speaks of "the Son of Man" coming "in His glory, and all His Holy Angels with Him,"[b] the first question which presents itself is *this*: Is He referring to an event distinct from any which has yet occurred, and as future to us as it was future to the disciples who listened to Him in the Temple?

Now, here, it must be at once and fully admitted that throughout that most solemn and pathetic series of predictions from which to-day's Gospel is taken, our Lord is speaking of two distinct events, so simultaneously, that it is at times difficult to say of which He is speaking. The whole discourse took its rise from an allusion of the disciples to the scene around them.

The disciples were expressing their wonder at the

[a] Tit. iii. 4, 5. [b] St. Matt. xxv. 31.

great constructive works in the Temple area, which Herod had begun, and which were still in progress; "the buildings of the Temple," as St. Matthew[a] has it; the adornments "of goodly stones and gifts," as St. Luke[b] reports. These structures, so solid, so beautiful, seemed to have been built, as men speak, for eternity; of themselves they seemed to promise and insure a long future of prosperity and splendour. Our Lord knew that the constructions which so impressed His simple followers were raised only to be—almost immediately—destroyed; that, almost before the sculptor's tool had ceased to echo on the unfinished walls, the ear would detect the tramp of the Roman legions advancing towards the doomed city on their terrible errand of justice and of destruction. "And He said unto them, See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down."[c] And then when the disciples pressed Him privately for further information as to the time when this catastrophe might be expected to take place, He told them that it would be preceded by the appearance of false Messiahs; by great political troubles; by persecutions of Christians, specially of themselves; by a preaching of the "Gospel of the Kingdom"[d] throughout the world, for a witness to all nations."

Were these conditions satisfied before the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus? In a certain sense they were; but only in a modified and imperfect sense. Already our Lord's thought appears to be passing, or to have passed, from the nearer judgment upon Jerusalem to a sterner and more awful judgment of which it was a shadow.

He has before Him two future events—a nearer and

[a] St. Matt. xxiv. 1.
[b] St. Luke xxi. 5.
[c] St. Matt. xxiv. 2.
[d] *Ib.* 14.

a more distant; not one event. When He is speaking, each of these events is future; and they are, as St. Chrysostom puts it, like two ranges of distant mountains, one beyond another. To the eye of a distant spectator these horizons seem to form a single line. Their real distinctness is only apparent when you approach them, or rather, when you have passed the first of the two ranges. "This generation shall not pass away, till all these things be fulfilled,"[a] could only refer to the nearer judgment. But "the Gospel of the Kingdom must first be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations," cannot be supposed to have been realized, in its full complement of meaning, even yet. The precept to flee to the mountain[b] districts of Judæa on the approach of the Roman armies, could only refer to the destruction of the Holy City. The prediction that "the powers of heaven should be shaken,"[c] could only be applied to anything that would occur in the Jerusalem of the age of the Cæsars—whether its hierarchy or its worship—by very frivolous interpreters. When our Lord said that men would see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with power and great glory, He did not merely mean that they would see in the destruction of Jerusalem a vindication and triumph of the cause of Christ; that His coming in the clouds of heaven was a metaphorical equivalent for the destruction of the City of David amid scenes of fire and blood. If that had been His meaning, it might have been much more simply expressed, and in less misleading terms. If His language is carefully examined, it will be seen that He Himself distinguished the two events, as belonging to distinct periods. He first dwells on the destruction of the City. He then predicts, as a later and an altogether dis-

[a] St. Matt. xxiv. 34. [b] *Ib.* 16. [c] *Ib.* 29.

tinct occurrence, His own coming to judgment; although there are also sentences in which He speaks of these events as together embodying that idea of judgment which is common to them both.

Certainly, when our Lord spoke in these solemn terms of Himself, as coming in a cloud, or, as St. Matthew[a] has it, "in the clouds of heaven," He was appropriating, as belonging to His Person, that vision of the Prophet Daniel[b] in which "One like the Son of Man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him. And there was given Him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve Him." But Daniel says nothing of the judgment; and our Lord, therefore, is not merely applying the Prophet's language to Himself; He is doing so with reference to a particular occasion which He announces. It is this which would of itself have made it impossible to resolve the allusions to the "clouds" and "dominion" and "glory" into a mere metaphor, descriptive of the spiritual side of great calamities, if indeed our Lord had not, in that great representation of the Last Judgment which is given us by St. Matthew,[c] and which followed immediately upon this discourse, so expanded what He here refers to more concisely as to make this procedure impossible. That awful Picture of the King on His Throne, with all nations before Him, with the hosts of ministering angels, with the impassable chasm between saved and lost, with the twofold sentence, is either in its broad outlines a substantial prediction, or it is a worthless fiction. There is no real room for doubting what the Speaker meant by it; and He will be taken at His word or not, as men believe or do not believe that He is what He claimed to be.

[a] St. Matt. xxiv. 30. [b] Dan. vii. 13. [c] Ch. xxv.

Undoubtedly the destruction of Jerusalem, like earlier judgments, was a shadow of the Great Day. It was to the generation which listened to our Lord and His Apostles what the great judgments upon Assyria and Babylon had been to the hearers of Isaiah and Jeremiah. In the language of those Prophets, there is a continual hinting at, a more or less distinct anticipation of, a judgment beyond that immediately in view. With them, also, the frontier-line between the nearer present and a distant future continually becomes indistinct; the horizon constantly widens. Beyond the Eastern metropolis the sin-laden civilization of all ages comes into view; beyond the Kings of Assyria or Babylon, the evil spirit, the Prince of the power of the air; beyond the victorious Cyrus and the avenging Persians, we almost discern the form of the True King of Humanity, and of those countless Ministers of His who surround His Throne. Every judgment is a forecast of the Last, just as every earlier grace is a type and presentiment of the great Redemption. Every judgment, the greatest as well as the least, is the outcome and expression of an eternal law in the Mind of God; of the law which binds Him, in virtue of His unalterable Nature, to hate moral evil, as being a contradiction of that Nature; to separate it from good; to judge it. In our Lord's Mind, we may dare to say, the destruction of Jerusalem and the final Day of Doom are two illustrations, on very different scales, of that one and the same aspect of the Being of God which looks towards moral evil. The two judgments melt into each other, because in principle they are one; but they are not the less really distinct from each other either in the language of Christ or in the order of events.

II.

The difficulty, which most men probably feel at some time, is how to realize that the Last Judgment will one day certainly take place; as certainly as that we have met in this Cathedral this afternoon. For a man who has any hold whatever upon the Christian Faith, this difficulty exists for the imagination rather than for the reason. If the reason is convinced, first, of the possibility of miracles —and this possibility cannot be denied by a serious believer in a living and moral God—and, secondly, of the truth of the historical fact that Jesus Christ did really rise again from the dead—and St. Paul will tell him that while the fact was in his lifetime a matter of widespread notoriety, it could not be denied without breaking altogether with anything that could be called Christianity[a]—if, I say, a man be thus convinced that such a miracle as the Resurrection of Christ is historically true, he ought to have no serious difficulty, on the score of reason, in believing the Last Judgment. He has already admitted the truth of the Supernatural in an instance of capital importance; he has already admitted, upon adequate evidence, that the Lord Jesus, while upon earth, was not uniformly subject to those laws of life and death which govern us within the range of our present experience. If this fact warrants, as in reason it does warrant, confidence in the Words of Jesus Christ, and confidence in His Power, it obliges us to believe that He will come to judge us. For that He uttered the words of the text is beyond question. The most destructive criticism of the day sees in them, what it condescends to term, one of the really historical elements of the first Gospel. That He had a right to

[a] 1 Cor. xv. 14.

utter them, is proved by the fact of His Resurrection; it set the seal upon His words.

Unless, then, reason takes exception either to the possibility of miracles, and so rejects any serious Theism, or to the truth of Christ's Resurrection, and so denies the truth of Christianity, reason must perforce admit that the Last Judgment is not a difficulty—at least, for itself.

But it is a difficulty for the imagination; and the imagination has a trick, upon occasions, of making itself look very like reason. The imagination finds it hard to picture to itself this tremendous collapse, this altogether unparalleled catastrophe, after the passage of centuries or of ages, during which the world has pursued its accustomed course. The imagination cannot conceive, amid the well-ordered, prosaic facts of our daily life, so sublime and terrific an interruption, so overwhelming a conclusion of all that we see and are conversant with. That [a] "the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up," seemed quite natural to St. Peter, because it had, in effect, been announced by his Master. And when St. Peter foresaw that there would come, in the last times, [b] "scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of His coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the Creation," he dismisses the objection by observing that it transfers to the Counsels of the Eternal Mind our petty and cramped ideas about the lapse of time. With Him, in Whose Nature there is no succession of events, Who knows neither present nor future, "one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." [c] If He seems to delay, it

[a] 2 St. Pet. iii. 10. [b] *Ib.* v. 3, 4. [c] *Ib.* 8.

is His mercy, not His forgetfulness or His impotence, that is the reason: He is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to be saved."[a]

In these days the form of the objection is altered. We do not—at least, with few exceptions—endeavour to decide on God's movements by anticipation, and then profess ourselves unsatisfied if the event does not correspond. It is now said that scientific intellect, which might perhaps be more accurately described as scientific imagination, tends more and more decidedly to reject the idea of catastrophes, whether in the physical or the moral world, and to substitute for them the idea of a graduated development. Where a ruder world looked for some personal agencies, our age, we are told, sees the tranquil operation of unchanging laws; and this difference of conception makes the idea of a vast catastrophe, such as is the Judgment, as brought before us in the New Testament, more and more unwelcome to the thought of the time.

And yet, let me ask, is there really any such antagonism as is here assumed between the idea of a catastrophe and the idea of a progressive development? Is it not, at least, possible that a development, whether in external nature or in human life, is the cause of the catastrophes which momentarily arrest it, and give it possibly a new direction?

The outbreak of a volcano, for instance, or a landslip, or one of those vast changes which, at a period, it is difficult to say how remote, upheaved central rocks and, as the geologists tell us, changed the surface of this globe again and again before it was inhabited by man, are examples of such catastrophes. And these catastrophes are each of them the product of a long, unseen process of ferment and preparation. The volcanic lava does not

[a] 2 St. Pet. iii. 9.

boil for the first time when it breaks forth from the crater; the soil does not disappear in a moment from beneath the topmost stratum, so as to make a landslip possible; and as for those great catastrophes, the history of which is written in the rocks, they can only have been possible after a long preceding travail in the bowels of the earth, which at length expressed itself in a terrific outbreak.

So it is in the moral and social world. There is an old saying that no criminal becomes very bad indeed, quite suddenly.[a] Nothing may have been remarked in his outward bearing; but there must have been an inward history of the resistance to conscience and spiritual light, that gradually led up to the public crime which has startled the world out of belief in his respectability. In the same way, acts of heroic goodness, which may be observed sometimes in very simple, unpretending people, and which seem to be almost out of place in them, are really the creation of a long secret training by the Holy Spirit, which no human eye has witnessed, but which has at last produced this sublime and unexpected result. So it is in the collective life of man, whether social, political, or national. If ever there was an historical catastrophe, it was the French Revolution, at the end of the last century; the events which began in 1789 are certainly the most remarkable in modern European history. But who supposes that the causes of the French Revolution date from 1789? Every student of history knows that they reach back, some of them into the Middle Ages, most of them to the reign of Louis XIV., all of them, it may be said with certainty, to a time which preceded the accession to the throne of France of the unfortunate king who died in 1793 on the scaffold. They had been working

[a] "Nemo repentè fuit turpissimus."

beneath the smooth surface of French life, and at last they took an outward and visible form, and broke up a social fabric which had lasted for a thousand years. It was a vast catastrophe; but it was the result of a still more vast and complex process of development.

Our physical frames afford an illustration of the same law. It has been said that every man in middle life carries about with him the seeds of the disease which, if nothing else anticipates its action, will lay him in his grave. Of course, as we know, the development of this latent germ of death may be traversed and arrested by some other and more powerful cause. A man may be cut off by violence; he may fall a victim to an infection; he may destroy his physical powers by profligate excesses. But, barring these contingencies, he carries within him some constitutional predisposition, some imperfection of a vital organ, some half-concealed but fatal irregularity or weakness which bides its time. It bides its time; and as the years pass it strengthens its hold upon the system. We do not see much difference from day to day, or from week to week; but, looking over longer tracts of time, between this year and that, we see a difference. It bides its time; and at last that up to which it leads, that for which it prepares, has come. It may be the calmest of deaths; so calm that the bystanders cannot say when the last breath is drawn. But, for all that, it is a catastrophe; the catastrophe which is the product of a long development. That one moment in which we first enter upon another world, and see new sights, and hear new sounds, and find ourselves in a sphere of being utterly distinct from any of which we have had experience, however it may be ushered in, must be to each one of us an unparalleled catastrophe.

Nor will it be otherwise with that mighty event—the Last Judgment—which the Gospel of to-day forces on

our notice. Doubtless the date of the Judgment is in the Hands of God; of that day and that hour neither man nor angel knows, but only the Father.[a] It is one of those times and seasons which He has put in His own power.[b] And, as the earliest Christians, especially at Thessalonica, found by experience[c] beneath the very eyes of the Apostle, its date cannot be conjectured by man without risk of folly and disappointment. But it is not, therefore, arbitrarily or capriciously fixed in such sense as to have no relation to the collective life of humanity. In this matter, as in all His Providences, the Everlasting Moral Being works by rule. And we may dare to say that the Day of Judgment will have as real a relation to a network of antecedent causes leading up to it, and, indeed, demanding it as necessary to a perfect moral government, as is the case with all the lesser judgments, having this world only for their sphere, which have preceded it. The idea of a "fulness of time"[d] with which we meet in Scripture, as applied to the Incarnation, is applicable to the Judgment. God alone knows when the time is full, when all the necessary probations are over, all the destined siftings and separations are completed, all the measures of iniquity have overflowed,—in a word, when all the process of preceding development is at an end. We can but watch and wait; but if the veil could be removed from our eyes we should see, where now we can at best conjecture. Corresponding to that ceaseless going to and fro before the Throne of those angel ministers of God who do His pleasure,[e] we should note the gradual ripening and perfecting of good and evil here beneath, the ever-accumulating multitudes of those who will stand on the right hand and on the left, the growth of all the preparations

[a] St. Matt. xxiv. 36. [b] Acts i. 7. [c] 2 Thess. ii. 2–5.
[d] Gal. iv. 4. [e] Ps. ciii. 21.

in individuals and in history, which will only be completed, and which will have been completed at the decisive moment when the heavens shall open, and we shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with power and great glory.

III.

Brethren, what will be to all of us the significance of that moment? There are many public events of great political importance which take place every year, which affect the destinies of monarchs and of nations, but which do not really touch you and me. We look at them with interest because they are public; but they pass over our heads, and we find that the day after their occurrence is much the same as the day before it. But it will not be so with the Last Judgment. It will come home to every one of us as directly, as closely, as anything can. We shall all see Jesus Christ as He is, in His great Majesty and Glory. He veiled His true dignity when He lived on earth; and it has been hidden in the heights of heaven from mortal sight during the eighteen centuries of Christendom. And so it happens that, comparatively speaking, only a minority think of Him at all, since "the natural man understandeth not the things of the Spirit of God, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."[a] But when He comes to Judgment, "every eye shall see Him."[b] Jews and Gentiles, Christians and Mussulmans, Buddhists and Pagans, will see Jesus Christ on His Throne of Glory. Those words of David, "The Lord is known by the judgment which He executeth,"[c] will be fulfilled. He will be known in His

[a] 1 Cor. ii. 14. [b] Rev. i. 7. [c] Ps. ix. 16.

righteousness and His power; He will teach every soul what He is in Himself, and what He has been to it during the day of life; He will justify His award by a complete revelation of His mercy and His justice.

More than this; He will teach us all to know ourselves as we have never known ourselves before. In His Awful Light we shall see light; we shall see ourselves. All of us, we shall see ourselves; not as we appear to others; not as we appear each to himself, in our self-indulgent thoughts; but as we are. The day for disguises, for false impressions, for half-truths which dare not be more, will have passed—passed beyond recall,—passed for ever.

Those who have really loved and served Jesus Christ, amid misunderstanding and coldness, but with an inward sense of His Loving Presence which has made them indifferent to outward things, will then be seen as they are; saved amid imperfections, saved because robed in a Righteousness which is not their own. When Christ, Who is their Life, shall appear, then will they also appear with Him in glory.[a] It will be their day of triumph over all the criticisms levelled at their presumed folly; it will be their day of recompense for all the humiliations and sufferings they have undergone.

But not they only will be manifested in the Light of Jesus Christ. "God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil."[b]

All the sins which have been concealed through shame of discovery, or through hypocrisy; all that has been forgotten, neglected, ignored, will start up before our eyes into vivid reality, as if memory had not grown weak, as if time had not passed, since the moment of commission. Habits as well as acts, intentions as well as com-

[a] Col. iii. 4. [b] Eccles. xii. 14.

pleted efforts, words as well as works, will reappear, each with a photographic distinctness, before our eyes, just as each was present to us at the very moment of conception, or utterance, or action, only illuminated as to its true character by a moral light which nothing can escape.

We shall try to take refuge, perhaps, in the "vain things which charm us most" here and now. But they will then have ceased to charm; they, too, will be judged of by us as they are judged of now by God and His Angels. Ambitions, reputations, titles, stations, possessions, which are now so much to us, will be nothing then. These things were really weighed by Jesus Christ when He hung upon the Cross of shame; it was a sentence, the Crucifixion, solemnly passed on the whole outward life of man, as being, relatively to his inward and eternal life, worthless. This is not understood now, except by a small minority; it will be as clear as the daylight to all at the Day of Judgment. "For the day of the Lord of hosts shall be upon every one that is proud and lofty, and upon every one that is lifted up; and he shall be brought low; and upon all the cedars of Lebanon, that are high and lifted up, and upon all the oaks of Bashan, and upon all the high mountains, and upon all the hills that are lifted up, and upon every high tower, and upon every fenced wall, and upon all the ships of Tarshish, and upon all pleasant pictures. And the loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be made low; and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day."[a]

This side of the judgment will be more readily understood by us in these solemn hours, when the whole nation is watching with breathless suspense at the bedside of the Prince whom it has long learned to look upon as its

[a] Isa. ii. 12–17.

future Sovereign.[a] We meet to-day under the shadow of a great anxiety—great in itself and in its possible consequences. But sickness and death know no favourites; in presence of the last realities, we are, all of us—the highest and the lowest—altogether on a level. While we lift up our hearts earnestly to God in prayer for the sufferer, who but yesterday was enjoying all that this world could give, and in whose future his country had so high a stake; while we pray not less fervently for his august mother, our beloved and gracious Sovereign, and for his wife and children, let us not forget to note the lesson which all severe sickness teaches, and which all would have us learn who have to any good purpose been near to Death and Judgment. All that does not lead to God or come from Him; all that belongs merely to the things and scenes of time; all that cannot, as can God's grace, and faith, and hope, and love, be truly incorporated with the very life of that soul to which the death of the body is but a surface-incident in its existence—is really nothing, if, indeed, it be not much worse than nothing. The lessons of Judgment which now come to us in the words of Scripture and in the warnings of the Church, year by year, as the dark and wintry days come round in Advent, will be then a most solemn reality. God grant that we may now prepare ourselves for it. As the days pass, the Judgment comes nearer and nearer. As the days pass, we become, for good or evil, more and more like what we shall be seen to be when we are judged. The materials for the Judgment are getting ready, not merely in the courts of Heaven around the Throne, but within the precincts of our several consciences; the Judge's words will find an echo, for weal or woe, within each one of us. But

[a] During a part of December, 1871, the public anxiety on account of the illness of the Prince of Wales was at its height.

He Who will judge us then offers to save us now. It is because "we believe that He will come to be our Judge, that we therefore pray Him to help us His servants, whom He has redeemed with His precious Blood." There is still time to be covered with His Robe of Righteousness; there is time to take such fast hold upon His Cross, as to look forward without terror to standing before His Throne.

SERMON III.

THE PRECURSOR.

(THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT.)

ST. MATT. XI. 10.

For this is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send My messenger before Thy face, which shall prepare Thy way before Thee.

IN the Gospels for the two last Sundays in Advent, the figure of St. John the Baptist is only less prominent than that of the coming Saviour. The Gospel for to-day apparently was not appointed on account of the message which the Baptist sent to our Lord out of his prison, but to illustrate the great position which belonged to him in relation to the history of the Redemption and of the world. Our Lord says expressly that in the Baptist the words of Malachi,[a] which had been pondered over so anxiously by every religious Jew for four centuries, had at last their complete fulfilment. "This is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send My messenger before Thy Face, which shall prepare Thy way before Thee." This explanation of the prophecy followed necessarily from our Lord's own claim to be the true Messiah. If He was the Messiah, He must, the Jews knew, have had such a forerunner as had been foretold by prophecy; and there

[a] Mal. iii. 1.

was no one who answered to this character so well as St. John, while St. John did altogether answer to it.

Until it was fulfilled, prophecy, from the nature of the case, had a vague sound in the ears of those who heard it. Each prophecy, they thought, might possibly apply to a great many persons. Each of the separate prophecies which, as we Christians see, have their fulfilment in our Lord, or His Redemption, or His Church, might have been previously supposed to apply to very different persons, works, or institutions in the future. To the Jews between Malachi and our Lord, there might have seemed to be much room for free conjecture as to who the Lord's messenger would be; they generally believed that the Prophet Elijah[a] would return to earth and would by doing so realize the prediction. Prophecy ceases to be indefinite; it is explained, or, as we should say, it is clenched by the appearance of its object. When our Lord came, those who received Him ceased to have any doubts on the score of the prophecy of Malachi. The Baptist said of himself that he was not Elijah, when he was questioned on this head by a commission sent to him by the Sanhedrin. He meant that he was not literally that prophet returned to earth from another world. But it was, nevertheless, true that he had come in the stern religious spirit and popular power of Elijah; and so our Lord said that in the Baptist the Jewish expectations about Elijah were fulfilled. "If ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come."[b] It being granted that Jesus was what He claimed to be, it followed that St. John was the messenger sent before His Face to prepare His way before Him.

[a] St. Matt. xvii. 10; St. John i. 21. [b] St. Matt. xi. 14.

I.

That our Lord should have had a precursor at all may at first sight seem singular; we may think that He was sufficiently His own herald and introduction, and that He could not well be recommended to the thoughts and hearts of men by one altogether His inferior. The greater may introduce the less, we say to ourselves, not the less the greater. But the arrangement before us is very much in harmony with God's general providences. God does not seem as a rule to allow any great truth or blessing to burst upon the world without some sort of preparation. It may be urged that prophecy had already been such a preparation; that prophecy had described beforehand Christ's Person, His Work, His Kingdom; that it had educated the Jewish people to look out for Him, or that it might well have done so; that, if it did not suffice, nothing else would suffice; and that, viewed in the light of prophecy, St. John's mission seems to want an object, to be an unmeaning repetition of what had already been done. But prophecy itself predicts St. John. Prophecy and the Baptist were both preparations for Christ: prophecy a remote, St. John an immediate preparation. Prophecy educated religious souls among the Jews to look out for a Messiah; St. John pointed Him out to them. St. John's business was first of all to gain the ear of his countrymen; then to say, "The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand;" [a] then, "Behold the Lamb of God!" [b] St. John, in the kingdom of grace, was like those gifted men in the world of thought or of practical life, who are always just ahead of the masses around them. They have the inspiration, not of supernatural grace, but

[a] St. Matt. iii. 2. [b] St. John i. 29.

of natural genius, itself a gift of God, but of a different order of value and power. They are like lofty mountains whose summits the sun has already lit up, at an hour when he has not yet risen upon the plains beneath. Truth has come to them before coming to all; it has come to them as its predestined forerunners. The speculative truth which everybody will recognize ten years hence, they see now. But they are alone on their watch-towers: if they say what they think, it is only to be smiled down as enthusiasts. The practical discovery, of which everybody will proclaim the high importance in another generation, they advocate now; amid the discouraging criticisms of friends who advise them not to risk capital upon a wild venture. The social improvement or public reform, which nobody will think of challenging when at no distant date it has become law or custom, they plead for now, when it is denounced as reaction or revolution, and is universally unpopular. Many such men will occur to our memories in modern English history. They abound in literary, in commercial, in political, in professional life. They seem to illustrate a law of God's providence. Rarely does He so take us by surprise as to dispense with some similar preparation for that which He is going to teach us or to do for us; there are hints and indications, more or less plain, of His Work and Will. We see the signs of the Son of Man in the course of events, or in the intellectual heavens. We note the streaks of dawn which tell of the coming Day.

II.

A work like that of St. John's demands many high qualities; but two beyond others.

Of these the first is courage. It is not every man

who has always the courage to publish the advent of truth, even if he anticipates it. In many ages it has been very perilous to do so. It has always been, and is now, more or less difficult. Many a man has fondled truth in his secret soul, comprehending its preciousness to others as well as to himself, yet not daring to proclaim it. If bodily torture or loss of goods be not before his eyes, at least there is probably a hostile block of public opinion, with its coarse weapons of denunciation, and its lighter shafts of ridicule; and he cannot bear that. He shrinks back into himself; he is willing to believe that he is modest, or incapable, or too much before his time, or too much behind it, as the case may be. He does not look his real motives in the face; and we will not be hard on him, unless we can be sure that, in his position, we should do better than he.

That St. John was courageous, it is unnecessary to say. He had no scruple in bidding the most influential classes in the country, the Scribes and Pharisees, when they came to receive his baptism, to repent. They were offended at being asked to imagine that they had anything to repent of. He warned them of the wrath to come. They had no notion that it had anything to do with them. He tore off the veil which concealed their secret ground of confidence. They were not to say within themselves that they were the descendants of Abraham; since God could, if He pleased, raise up new children to the father of the faithful out of the very stones around them.[a] To say this to men whose genealogy was their all—to whom blood-relationship with Abraham was as precious as is living union with Christ to a Christian — required courage. And to follow it up by insisting that judgment was near; that the axe was laid to the root of the old tree of Jewish

[a] St. Matt. iii. 7–9.

national life; and that not to bear moral and spiritual fruit was to be hewn down presently and cast into the fire;[a]—this required more courage still.

The Baptist was not less brave in his dealings with the great. He was no court preacher such as there have been from time to time in Europe, who left out of his message all that might offend kingly ears. Herod Antipas, Tetrarch of Galilee and Peræa, was living incestuously with the wife of his brother Philip—not Philip the Tetrarch, but another son of Herod the Great, who was spending his days in retirement at Rome. The Baptist did not permit himself to excuse this breach of the Law of God, by the doctrine that kings cannot be expected to observe rules which are binding by God's ordinance, and in conscience, upon private people. Herod, too, was under a law, whether he acknowledged it or not; and St. John simply told him the truth, which his own conscience echoed. "It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife."[b] Those few words cost St. John his life. The vicious and sensual woman whose character was involved determined to have her revenge. St. John was thrown into a gloomy fortress on the shores of the Dead Sea, where, after a revel in which the daughter of Herodias again overruled the mind of the weak king, the fearless preacher ended his days by martyrdom.[c]

For courage of this description there are two necessary conditions.

First of all, there must be a firm, definite conviction that certain things are true—worth working for, worth suffering for, worth dying for. Such a conviction is the very foundation-stone of all higher moral life. When all seems hazy, indefinite, uncertain, a mere outline which

[a] St. Matt. iii. 10. [b] *Ib.* xiv. 4. [c] *Ib.* 6–10.

fades away into the mist, a mere balance of equally poised probabilities, high moral effort is impossible. Men will not work, suffer, die, for a will-of-the-wisp, whether in matters of practical life or in matters of religious belief. And one of the evils which the modern sceptical spirit has inflicted upon this generation is that it has, beyond any other cause, impoverished our moral life. By sapping all earnest conviction as to the truth of the Creed, the trustworthiness of Holy Scripture, the mission and nature of the Christian Church, the Divine and Everlasting Person of Jesus Christ, the reality of the work of the Holy Spirit, the power and grace of the Sacraments, it has eaten out the very heart of Christian courage; it has done even more to damage the moral than the intellectual life of religion. St. John had the most sharply defined convictions, with which he went to work. He knew that a new spiritual society, to be called the Kingdom of God, was on the point of being set up upon the earth.[a] He knew that his countrymen must either repent of their many sins against truth and grace, or perish.[b] He knew that the One Central Figure in human history, a Being Who existed while he himself was yet unborn, was on the point of appearing among men.[c] What mattered it to him if Jewish mobs and Roman soldiers, if Scribes and Pharisees, Sadducees and Herodians, thought otherwise? He at least must go forward, come what might; his robust conviction was the secret of his courage.

Another condition of such courage is independence. By this I do not mean want of consideration for the feelings or for the convictions of other people. The bravest men are naturally the gentlest and the most considerate; since to be courteous and forbearing towards an opponent

[a] St. Matt. iii. 2. [b] St. Luke iii. 8, 9. [c] St. John i. 15–18.

you must be conscious of strength. By independence I mean freedom from those motives of self-interest and subservience which at critical moments stay the hand and silence the tongue of ordinary men. St. John had secured his independence from his earliest years. "He was in the deserts till the days of his showing unto Israel."[a] He gave no pledges to society, to the world; he looked to it for nothing, he feared nothing that it could do. He lived as what we should call a hermit, in the barren waste which extended along the western shores of the Dead Sea;[b] he was clothed, like the ancient prophets, in a camel's skin;[c] he lived upon the wild food which he could gather in the desert.[d] And therefore "when Jerusalem, and all Judæa, and all the region round about Jordan,"[e] went out unto him, he owed this mass of civilized, wealthy, conceited, deluded people, nothing—absolutely nothing—except the truth. That which he owed he gave, without reserve, because without any fear of personal consequences. "O generation of vipers," he cried, "who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance."[f] This independence of all social fear, joined to his strong convictions of the truth of his message, made the Baptist, in his weakness, strong with the strength of the truest courage.

III.

A second quality needed for a work like St. John's is disinterestedness. A man may be brave, but selfish.

[a] St. Luke i. 80.

[b] The local traditions place the scene of St. John's earlier retirement on the mountains south-west of Jerusalem, near the reputed country home of Zacharias at Ain Karim.

[c] St. Matt. iii. 4. [d] *Ib.* [e] *Ib.* 5. [f] *Ib.* 7, 8.

He may work and endure, yet for himself. St. John was tried in this way, as only those can be tried who have at their command the results of courage and work. The Baptist might, as it seemed, had he so pleased, have become the founder of a religion, or at least of a religious school. Many gifted men have felt the ambition to become something of this kind. They have not felt the extreme responsibility of guiding others, or of dealing with religious truth, at all; most of all of dealing with it, as it were, out of their own heads, and making experiments in it without authority. A new invention in religion has appeared to them to be just as natural, just as legitimate, a thing as a new stroke in political life, or a new work of fiction. They have been conscious of possessing this form of power, and have not seen why they should not make the most of it. St. John the Baptist had among his disciples some who were of this mind about their master. They were anxious that he should be, and should be regarded as being, the founder of a new religious school. It appears to be highly probable that this feeling prevailed among them both during his lifetime and afterwards, especially at Ephesus, in the latter part of the Apostolic period, and that one object of the several notices of St. John the Baptist in the fourth Gospel was to counteract it. The disciples of the Baptist could not bear to think that the power and reputation of their beloved teacher would be eclipsed by the rising glory of Jesus of Nazareth; that his ministry would merely be the preface or introduction to that of another, and not something complete and final in itself. But the Baptist himself had never for one moment yielded to the temptation to make capital in the way of personal influence or consideration out of his popularity. He maintained in face of the multitudes who sought him in the

desert, that there came after him One Whose shoe's latchet he was not worthy to unloose; Who would baptize His people, not merely, as he himself did, in the waters of the Jordan, but with the purifying fire of the Eternal Spirit.[a] The Sanhedrin in Jerusalem sent a deputation to ask him formally whether he laid claim to being the promised Messiah. He made no such claim. He denied it.[b] They asked whether he was Elijah who had returned, as the Jews expected, from the dead. He was not.[c] They pressed him with the further inquiry whether he was the Prophet of popular expectation; the Prophet whom a common misapprehension of the time saw in the famous prediction of Deuteronomy.[d] He disclaimed the honour.[e] What was he, then? He was a message; only a message; a voice rather than a person; a man whose highest work and glory it was to forget his miserable self in the surpassing greatness of his commission from Heaven. "He said, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord."[f] They asked why, if this was so, he administered a baptism, which might seem to initiate into a new religion. He explained that his baptism was a mere symbol of repentance; differing thus in its essence from a Christian Sacrament, which is a channel of grace. He was to be followed by One Who would succeed him in the order of human life, but Who had existed when as yet he himself was unborn. "He it is, Who coming after me is preferred before me: for He was before me."[g] The Holy Ghost had taught Him, by a special revelation, Who Jesus was. His business henceforward was to forget himself; to point to the Lamb of God Which taketh away, as Isaiah had described,[h] the sin of the world; to lead his own disciples to leave

[a] St. John i. 26, 27, 33. [b] *Ib.* 19, 20. [c] *Ib.* 21. [d] Deut. xviii. 15, 18.
[e] St. John i. 21. [f] *Ib.* 23. [g] *Ib.* 15. [h] Isa. liii. 5–7.

himself for a Master Who would be more entirely worthy of their trust. When, at a later date, some of his disciples complained that Jesus baptized and all men came to him,[a] St. John replied that this was as it should be. He had never said that he was himself the Christ; they could witness it. He was not the true Bridegroom of the Church; he was only the Bridegroom's friend, whose business it was to make all ready for the bridal procession, to rejoice in the joy of Another, and to disappear when he had done his part.[b] "He must increase," said the Baptist, speaking of our Lord, "but I must decrease."[c] It was not a complaint; it was not even a regret; it was the simple announcement of a fact. When the sun was rising, the Morning Star had performed his task; his blessed task of ushering in the Day.

Doubtless it was this union of moral qualities in St. John which constituted the secret of his attractive power. Our Lord passed in review the reasons which led men to seek John's ministry as they did.[d] What had they gone out into the wilderness for to see? Was it a man who bent pliantly before every gust of popular opinion; who was of one mind at home and of another abroad; vehement with his inferiors or his equals and submissive with the great; plain-spoken when what he taught was generally acceptable and reticent when it was denounced? Was he a "reed shaken with the wind"? Such men do not really help, or guide, or influence their followers; they have evidently no convictions that can be trusted. A reed shaken with the wind may be very graceful, but it is of no sort of use as a support. Were they then looking for a frequenter of the houses of the great; a man who, above all things, was a man of society; whose

[a] St. John iii. 26.
[b] *Ib.* 28, 29.
[c] *Ib.* 30.
[d] St. Matt. xi. 7–9.

heart was in it, whose clothes and bearing spoke of it, whose soft raiment and delicate food meant wealth and station? Certainly St. John had relations with the Court, but they were not the relations of a courtier. He went to Court, not to get honour, but to proclaim truth. Was it, then, as a prophet that the multitude had sought him? Certainly he was a prophet, and on a level with the greatest of the order. But he was also much more. More on account of his work, which was not merely to foretell Christ, but to point Him out as visibly present; more, too, by reason of the lofty magnificence of his character. Men felt in him what they could not perhaps fully explain to themselves; they felt the power of this union of courage and self-forgetfulness; they felt in it the presence of a new order of things, of a higher conception of life and destiny. In his character, as in his death, St. John was a fit precursor of the Crucified Son of God; the predestined messenger sent before His Face, to prepare His way, in men's hearts, before Him.

IV.

To-day's Gospel suggests, and in the order of Church services was intended to suggest, one particular lesson.

On Thursday next, being St. Thomas's Day, this Cathedral will be the scene of an Ordination. The Bishop of London, as Chief Pastor of this Diocese, will publicly give ministerial character and power to a number of young men who are to do Christ's work in this great city and Diocese. This proceeding will be mentioned the next morning in all the newspapers, simply because it involves legal consequences to a great many persons. The Church being in this country connected with the State, an Ordination has the necessary effect of putting ordained persons

in a new relation towards the law of the land; they acquire by it rights and privileges on the one hand, and on the other they incur liabilities and are responsible for duties which did not belong to them before. This legal transfer, then, of a number of young men from the lay to the clerical estate is a fact of public and social importance, and as such it is mentioned in the newspapers. But to a believing Christian an Ordination means a great deal more; since his eyes are opened to see more than meets the natural sight.[a] He is conscious of witnessing an event in the history of the Kingdom of Heaven upon earth. To him an Ordination, if valid, as being administered by those who can do so without presumption, is of exactly the same value in an Established Church where it has great legal meaning, and in a Disestablished Church where it has none. Christ, the only Source of ministerial authority, is before the eyes of the believer, acting and speaking through His chief Minister. Christ, Who at the first gave ministerial power to His Apostles, is as good as His Word in being still with their successors, and in making their acts His own. How much depends upon each Ordination! How much to those who are ordained! How much to those whom they are to feed and teach, until Christ calls them to their account! Each one of them is, as to-day's[b] Collect reminds us, to be a precursor of His Second Coming; to prepare and make ready His way by turning the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, that at His Second Coming to judge the world we may be found an acceptable people in His sight. Will they be this? Who knows, you say, the real history of a soul; what it has been in the past, what it is likely to be in the time to come? Certainly, who knows? But this at least we do know; we may

[a] 1 Cor. ii. 14. [b] Third Sunday in Advent.

do something towards settling the question. We may pray for the newly ordained. We may show interest in them. We may make them feel that we expect much at their hands; that we esteem them highly in love for their works' sake.[a] We may discourage and frown down the cowardly disposition to which men sometimes yield, to drug their own consciences, and seek a transient popularity by denying the commission which Christ has given them. "Like priest, like people." Yes, but also, "Like people, like priest." Expect a man to be courageous, and you have done something to make him so. If he hints to you that he doubts the truth of half the Creed which he has undertaken to teach in the Name of Christ, do not compliment him on his liberality; since he is, in truth, at once weak and worse than weak, and it would be better for him and for you if he had never entered into the sacred engagements of Holy Orders at all. Expect a noble, truthful, independent bearing in him; expect him to be above the reach of the lower motives of self-interest which control the mass of men, and you will have helped him to become what you wish to see him. Expect disinterestedness in him, and you have made it difficult for him to be selfish. Form a high ideal of his mission and work, and let him know that you have formed it; you will have done him a service for which he will one day thank you, and which will return in blessings on yourselves.

During the past fortnight[b] few men have occupied a more prominent place in the public thought than those accomplished physicians, whose anxious duty it has been to watch, hour by hour, over a life bound up with the future destinies of this country, at the bedside of the Prince of Wales. No doubt these distinguished men

[a] 1 Thess. v. 13.

[b] Dec. 3–17, 1871.

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have been sustained, under the pressure of so severe a physical and mental strain, first of all and chiefly, by a sense of duty to their patient, their Sovereign, and their God. But do you suppose that they have not also been invigorated by knowing that the eyes and expectation of the whole country have been steadily fixed upon them; and that, while the result of their work is in the truest sense in higher Hands than theirs, their skill and perseverance is a matter of great concern to millions of Englishmen? Nor is it otherwise with the clergy. A sacred profession may, indeed, be reasonably expected to be more entirely under the control of the highest motives of duty than a secular one. But clergymen are, nevertheless, not a little dependent upon those to whom they minister even for that moral power which makes their ministry effective. St. Paul was never ashamed to own, even profusely, how much he owed to the generous sympathy of those whom he had won to Jesus Christ; and if you would see in the clergy of our own time something of the lofty character of St. John the Baptist, of his courage and his disinterestedness, you should remember, my lay brethren, that you are in a certain very real, although limited sense, responsible for their attaining it.

Indeed, all of us, who know any truth, and who, knowing it, owe it to others, are, whether we will or not, in our several degrees in the position of the Baptist. We have our responsibilities; even though, as it seems to us, we live in the social desert and eat locusts and wild honey. We have around us those to whom we ought to point out the Crucified Lamb of God, if we have found Him ourselves; and the nearness of His eternal Kingdom, if we know how near it is. God grant us for this work something of St. John's spirit; of his courage and his simple devotion to the work in hand; of his freedom from

thoughts of self. The end may be nearer than we think. What manner of men it will find us to be will depend in no slight degree on the degree in which we have been Christ's messengers to those around us,—in any case by example, perhaps by precept.

SERMON IV.

THE LIGHT OF THE LORD.

(FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT.)

ISA. II. 5.

O house of Jacob, come ye, and let us walk in the light of the Lord.

THIS invitation was uttered at a remarkable epoch in the history of the kingdom of Judah; either towards the close of the long and prosperous reign of Uzziah, or during that of his son and successor, Jotham. At that period—speaking broadly, seven centuries and a half before Christ—the kingdom of Judah had reached a higher point of prosperity and splendour than at any previous date since the fatal division of the nation under Rehoboam. At the time we are considering, the larger kingdom of the ten tribes was losing, year by year, the strength and importance which it had gained under Joash and Jeroboam II. Judah appeared to be winning what Israel lost. At the beginning of his long reign, Uzziah had found his country almost ruined. Amos, the homely shepherd-prophet of Tekoa, could compare the kingdom of Judah, at least ten years after Uzziah's succession to the throne, to a house full of fissures; so shattered and rent that its fall might be expected at any moment. But Uzziah was not without the qualities of a great ruler.

He was at once a fearless warrior, a skilful architect, and a far-sighted administrator. Uzziah conquered the Philistines,[a] dismantled the fortified places, Gath and Ashdod, and placed Jewish colonists up and down the conquered country. He battled successfully with the war-like tribes of Arabia Petræa;[b] he received presents—tokens of a respectful acknowledgment of his power—from those old enemies of his country, the Ammonites; while his name inspired respect on the very frontiers of Egypt.[c] He spent particular care on the organization and equipment of his army, which, according to the official calculation, amounted in all to more than the astonishing sum of three hundred thousand men.[d] He was careful to furnish this host with all the most effective weapons of the time;[e] he contrived, in particular, some ingenious machines, to fire from the ramparts of Jerusalem, for the purpose of shooting either large stones or arrows against a besieging force.[f] He exhibited his constructive skill in strengthening the fortifications of the capital: at three distinct points the defences of Jerusalem bristled with new and formidable works;[g] and a line of towers protected the herdsmen on the southern frontier against the incursions of the wild desert tribes.[h] Uzziah was even more careful of the arts of peace than of those of war. The royal herds and flocks were pastured in the then fertile districts of South-west Palestine, and on the hills beyond the Jordan, which had been assigned to the tribe of Reuben, cisterns were dug for their refreshment, and castles were built for their protection; while the hillsides up and down the country were covered with husbandmen and vinedressers in the royal service.[i] A successful expedition against Edom was followed by an attempt to renew the

[a] 2 Chron. xxvi. 6. [b] *Ib.* 7. [c] *Ib.* 8. [d] *Ib.* 13.
[e] *Ib.* 14. [f] *Ib.* 15. [g] *Ib.* 9. [h] *Ib.* 10. [i] *Ib.*

favourite policy of Jehoshaphat; the seaport of Elath, on the Red Sea, was built for purposes of navigation and commerce;[a] and Jewish ships, even in that distant age, coasted round the southern point of Africa, up the western side of the continent, to Tarshish, at the mouth of the Guadalquivir, in Spain, returning with their freight through the Straits of Gibraltar.

All this was perfectly familiar to Isaiah; he was an historian of events as well as an observer of men. The author of the Chronicles tells us that "the rest of the acts of Uzziah, first and last, did Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz, write."[b] That particular writing, so far as we know, is lost; but from the prophecies of Isaiah we discover that the temper of his countrymen was such as their great prosperity would be too likely to produce. They felt as men feel who have suddenly risen out of insignificance or misfortune into power; they felt as their ancestors had felt again and again in the vicissitudes of their eventful history; they had the temper of some of our English cavaliers in those first years which succeeded the restoration of Charles II.; they were not unlike the Germans in the spring of last year, at the conclusion of their great war with France.[c] They had the strength and the presumption of overweening confidence; confidence in the government, confidence in the future, confidence in themselves. They were no longer confined, as in previous years, to the narrow limits of their own little territory; they were in correspondence with the surrounding world, and to a great extent its masters. It was a proud moment—as men speak—for the country; when to be a Jew was to be wealthy and prosperous at home; when to be a Jew was to be feared and respected abroad; when it

[a] 2 Chron. xxvi. 2. [b] *Ib.* 22.

[c] This sermon was preached in Advent, 1872.

was to have a share and stake in the destinies of a powerful nation, and when it encouraged a man, without being irrational, to cherish high hopes and far-reaching ambitions. In short, the Jews of Isaiah's early years were not merely self-satisfied; they were holding their heads high in Western Asia. They compared their present circumstances with their past; their hopes for the future with their experience in the present; and they thought that "their houses would continue for ever, and that their dwelling-places would endure from one generation to another; and called the lands after their own names."[a]

Every prosperous civilization has a tendency to surround itself with a halo of false splendour; to throw off from its own feverish activity a phosphoric glare, and then to imagine that this is the shining of the sun in the heavens. It creates in its own behalf a diseased kind of public opinion; which will not hear of any higher standard than its own; which will not allow attention to be called to great sores or wounds, although they may threaten its very life; which cannot believe that so much activity and success will be followed by decay, judgment, dissolution, ruin. Such a public opinion is a formidable power, reacting upon and shaping the private opinions which contribute to create it; not merely when it is to a great extent healthy and sound, but when it is misguided and misleading. Such a public opinion there was in Isaiah's day, at once the product and the eulogist of the restored outward prosperity of the country; and it said again and again to the men of that generation, as they gazed on their ships, their warehouses, their fields, their vineyards, their fortifications, their troops, their specie, their public and private splendour, "This is real prosperity; this is real success; this may warrant you in bidding farewell to all

[a] Ps. xlix. 11.

anxiety, whether on the score of the present or the future: for this you do well to labour and to live." Such a public opinion is a great force; it is accepted and obeyed without resistance, almost without inquiry.

It was to a generation dazzled by an *ignis-fatuus* of this sort that Isaiah dared to cry, "Come, let us walk in the Light of the Lord." There was the irony of a profound contrast in the expression. The light in which Judah was walking, whatever its brilliancy might be, was certainly not the Lord's Light; it was a light which streamed upwards from earth, and not downwards from Heaven. It was, after all, man's idea about himself; not God's estimate of man. And yet men would fain believe that it was God's estimate because, forsooth, it was their own. They had to unlearn this miserable self-deception. Isaiah bade them come and walk in the Light of the Lord.

I.

"The Light of the Lord!" What did that Light mean for the Israel of Isaiah's day?

1. It meant, first of all, a true estimate of what the descendants of Jacob, the chosen people, were meant to be, in the Mind and predestination of God. This high and glorious ideal had been revealed to them. But it had been lost sight of. Isaiah quotes words which had already been used by Micah, and which were even then familiar to religious Jews as having Divine authority. They probably came to both prophets from some earlier age. They describe a world-embracing empire, but a spiritual one; an exaltation of Jerusalem, but not as a great military power; Jerusalem was to be a school and home of the nations, where they might learn, not the

duties of political submission, but the charms and the claims of truth.

> "And it shall come to pass in the last days,
> That the mountain of the Lord's house
> Shall be established in the top of the mountains,
> And shall be exalted above the hills;
> And all nations shall flow into it.
> And many people shall go and say,
> Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,
> And to the house of the God of Jacob;
> And He will teach us of His ways,
> And we will walk in His paths:
> For out of Zion shall go forth the Law,
> And the Word of the Lord from Jerusalem." [a]

Was this the ideal which had been brought before the national mind by the policy and triumphs of Uzziah and Jotham? When Uzziah conquered Arabs and Philistines, when he constructed fortifications and harbours, when he made provisions for agriculture and for commerce, he was, doubtless, doing the best he could for his people in a certain sense; but it was a sense which was common to himself and every heathen monarch in Asia. The Assyrians, too, were warriors; greater warriors than he; greater architects; greater in commercial and constructive enterprise. But Israel, if Israel only knew it, had, according to the Mind and Will of God, a higher and more splendid destiny: Israel was to have a place—at some future time as yet undetermined—in the Spiritual Empire of the world; a place unshared, unique, unapproachable. This place, this destiny, Israel was to keep steadily in view; for this Israel must prepare; with this preparation, no lower aim, no earthly ambition, no material splendour or success, ought to interfere.

To have forgotten this place, this destiny; to have exchanged it for the paltry glitter of heathen grandeur;

[a] Isa. ii. 2, 3.

was, in Isaiah's judgment, to be walking in the darkness; in an ignorance which simulated knowledge, in a light which only flickered sufficiently to mislead. "Come!" he cried, in indignation and agony, to his wandering countrymen—"come, let us walk in the Light of the Lord."

2. "The Light of the Lord!" It meant, secondly, a true appreciation, by the Jewish people, of their own moral and spiritual condition. The human light in which the nation was walking revealed to it only the splendour of its outward circumstances, the evidences of its wealth, of its power, of the material progress which everywhere met the eye. It did not pierce to the dark moral corruptions beneath; it did not even suspect their existence. The prophet, too, was not insensible to the governing movements, to the military and commercial enthusiasms of his age. He, too, noted the wealth and influence which were returning to the old capital of David and Solomon.

> "Their land is filled with silver and gold,
> And there is no end of their treasures." [a]

But he marked, too, how, in defiance of the rule laid down by the ancient law,[b] the ostentatious pomp of Solomon was again displaying itself.

> "Their land also is full of horses,
> And there is no end of their chariots." [c]

And he proclaimed how, as was natural, one kind of disobedience had already led on to a worse.

> "Their land also is filled with idols;
> They worship the work of their own hands,
> And that which their own fingers have made." [d]

Their commerce, their conquests, their enterprise, were so many channels of misery and danger. From the

[a] Isa. ii. 7. [b] Deut. xvii. 16. [c] Isa. ii. 7. [d] *Ib.* 8.

interior of Arabia and the port of Elath they imported luxuries in which Isaiah detected the sure instruments of future crime. The conquered Philistines persuaded them to join the corporations for the practice of witchcraft whether imposture or devilish, which especially centred in the great oracle of Baal-zebub at Ekron; and the children of enslaved and alien races were brought to Jerusalem for licentious purposes, to the destruction of the morals as well as of the faith of the people.

> "Thou hast rejected thy people the house of Jacob,
> For they are filled with things from the east,
> And are conjurers like the Philistines,
> And they please themselves in the children of strangers."[a]

Alas! the conquered heathen had more than avenged themselves by sapping the strength of the conquering race; by teaching Israel the vices which had ruined themselves. And thus the prosperity which, to the public opinion of the time, looked like the highest success, was, in the prophet's eyes, a presentiment or warrant of failure. It might seem at first sight to be the fulfilment of prophecy; in reality, it was a caricature of the true fulfilment, when the Law and memories of Sinai were being decently buried beneath the tinsel of a civilization which was idolatrous as well as corrupt. This outward glory, of which men thought and said so much, was, in Isaiah's eyes, like some royal robe thrown over a ghastly skeleton; its very beauty was in hideous contrast to the form of death beneath. "Come!" he cried to his countrymen—let there be a truce to our self-deception; let us look not merely at the surface of our national life, but at that which underlies it; let us look at things not merely as we wish to see them, but as they are. "Come, let us walk in the Light of the Lord."

[a] Isa. ii. 6.

3. "The Light of the Lord!" It meant, thirdly, an anticipation of coming Judgment. This third ray of the Divine Light falling on the national conscience—this last and, in some respects, this gravest of its discoveries—was practically inseparable from the two preceding. When man knows what God meant and enables him to be; when he knows what, as a matter of fact, he is; he knows also—he cannot but know—what must follow. God would not be Himself—Himself in His Sanctity or His Justice—if nothing were to follow; if it were possible that knowledge and grace could be thus succeeded by sin with entire impunity. With Judah's ideal of and capacity for true greatness, with Judah's deep degradations scarcely shrouded by what met the eye, it could not be that no change, no penal visitation, no catastrophe, was impending. No! when the Light of the Lord fell upon the conscience, men saw and knew that it could not last, this pageant of worldly and godless splendour; they felt that this glittering society, which discounted the future so largely, was visibly, rapidly ripening for approaching judgment. And Isaiah draws attention to this clear, piercing, awful Light; this Light of the Lord, radiating from His essential Justice. As men of all classes in Jewish society fell down before the idols which were imported from abroad, so all would share the coming ruin of the nation.

> "The mean man boweth down,
> And the great man humbleth himself:—
> And forgive them—No; Thou wilt not." [a]

The nation, so prosperous, so self-confident, would hide itself for very fear and shame, when the only true Glory, the Glory of the Lord, was manifested in judgment. Men would take refuge in the holes of the rocks, as if to escape from a hostile army; [b] they would bury themselves

[a] Isa. ii. 9. [b] *Ib.* 19.

with their faces in the sand, as if before the fatal simoon of the desert, that they might escape, if possible, from the intolerable sight.

> "Enter into the rock, and hide thee in the dust,
> For the fear of the Lord, and for the glory of His Majesty.
> The lofty looks of man shall be humbled,
> And the haughtiness of men shall be made low,
> And the Lord Alone
> Shall be exalted in that day." [a]

"That day!" What day? No doubt, in the first instance, the coming day of Judah's doom. After Uzziah came Jotham; [b] after Jotham came Ahaz [c]—when the secret idolatry of the preceding reigns stalked openly abroad, and the king himself made images for Baalim, and burnt his children to death to appease the Phœnician god Moloch.[d] Ahaz was defeated by Israel; [e] defeated by the Syrians; [f] besieged in Jerusalem; reduced to buy the dangerous assistance of the Assyrian, Tiglath-pileser, by plundering the temple; [g] his land was invaded on one side by the conquered Edomites, invaded on another by the conquered Philistines; [h] reduced, in short, to the extremities of humiliation and misery, and fairly placed in those relations of dependence upon the great Eastern monarchy which ended in the Captivity. Before Isaiah's eyes all the false glories of the preceding reigns already disappear. The splendid forests of Bashan and the Lebanon, from which were furnished their new mansions in Jerusalem, and the docks and timber-yards of Elath, would be recklessly destroyed; the newly cultivated hill-slopes would be trodden down and laid waste beneath the feet of Assyrian invaders; the fortifications on the frontiers and of Jeru-

[a] Isa. ii. 10, 11. [b] 2 Chron. xxvi. 23. [c] *Ib.* xxvii. 9.
[d] *Ib.* xxviii. 2, 3. [e] *Ib.* 5. [f] *Ib.*
[g] *Ib.* 20, 21. [h] *Ib.* 17, 18.

salem itself, constructed so carefully by Uzziah and Jotham, would be levelled with the ground; the fleets of merchantmen, which communicated with Africa and Spain, would pass into hostile hands; and the pleasant pictures, the works of art, whether in sculpture or painting —the original word includes both—brought by caravans across the desert, and by trading ships from beyond the sea, would perish in the general ruin.

"For the Lord of Hosts hath a day
Upon every one that is proud and lofty,
And upon every thing that is lifted up;
And it shall be brought low:
And upon all the cedars of Lebanon, that are high and lifted up,
And upon all the oaks of Bashan,
And upon all the high mountains,
And upon all the hills that are exalted,
And upon every lofty tower,
And upon every fortified wall,
And upon all the ships of Tarshish,
And upon all pleasant pictures.
And the loftiness of man shall be bowed down,
And the haughtiness of men shall be laid low:
And the Lord Alone shall be exalted in that day." [a]

"That day!" It was the Day of the Lord, or, as the language runs exactly, "The Lord hath a day." A day which already exists as a finished thought in the Divine Mind, so that the whole course of history is being guided on towards it. Already we feel in his language that Isaiah is thinking of a greater and more awful Judgment than any which could light upon a single nation. The prophets, from the days of Obadiah and Joel downwards, had foretold a day of world-wide Judgment, which would pass upon all earthly glory, and lay it low. And thus, just as, in Isaiah, the Evangelical promises to Israel soon, through their very fulness and magnificence, break down

[a] Isa. ii. 12–17.

all national barriers, and pass beyond all national horizons, since they cannot be confined to a single race; so the judgments which Isaiah heralds here and elsewhere are too terrible, too inclusive, to be merely Jewish in their reference. They embrace the world; they close, not any particular epoch, but the years of time. When Isaiah foretells that men "will creep into caves in the rocks, and into cellars in the earth, before the terrible look of Jehovah, and before the glory of His Majesty, when He ariseth to put the earth in terror" [a]—this last expression cannot possibly be satisfied by any interpretation which would confine it to the judgments which fell upon Judæa. In point of fact, as the prophet gazes into the future, these nearer judgments and the Judgment of judgments blend themselves in his vision; just as, in a later time,[b] our Lord Jesus Christ speaks of the approaching destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans and of the end of the world so simultaneously, that different events appear to be referred to by turns in a series of consecutive statements. The nearer earthly event is a shadow of the greater and more remote one; the nearer event furnishes the imagery by which the more remote is described. The punishment which its sin and its opportunities taken together would shortly earn for Judah, suggests something more overwhelming and more awful, which the opportunities and the sins of the race of mankind would render inevitable for the world.

"Come, then," cried the prophet to the men of his time —"come, let us walk in the Light of the Lord." Let us consult His revelations of His Will, let us consult the whispered apprehensions, nay, the more than apprehensions, of our own consciences, and we shall be certain that all will not go on for ever as it is going on now. A crisis

[a] Isa. ii. 19. [b] St. Matt. xxiv.

in public affairs, a catastrophe, a judgment, a penal and fearful visitation of some kind, is assuredly inevitable. Do not let us close our eyes, because we will not see what is coming; do not let us make the most of the present hour, and leave the awful future to take care of itself. It is not for this that a ray of Truth has fallen upon us from the Throne of Justice. "Come," while as yet it is not too late—"come, let us walk in the Light of the Lord."

II.

Can we suppose, my brethren, that the prophet's words have no meaning for modern peoples as well as for Judah of old? No; in reason we cannot. He Who governs the world, and is the real Author of human society, has given to every nation, ancient and modern, some ideal of its work and purpose which is more or less clearly presented to the national conscience. As Judæa and Greece and Rome were severally entrusted with a distinct function for the benefit of the rest of mankind; so each of the modern nations of Europe has, as its appointed task, to illustrate and propagate some one aspect or portion of truth or duty. This will scarcely be questioned by any who believe in the reality of the Divine government of the world. We English may well think that we have had more than one such purpose entrusted to us; the reconciliation of order and freedom, the harmonizing social inequalities with universal liberty, and, with general contentment, the diffusion of the highest truth throughout the world by means of our vast colonial system. Have we realized these ideals? are we realizing them, or giving any of them up, and turning our backs on them? Or are we too, like Judah of old, presenting to the eye the terrible contrast of vast accumulations of outward

wealth, and a vast load of secret moral as well as physical misery? And if this is so, can it be so for ever? must it not issue in some catastrophe, some judgment, unless, while we can, we resolve as a nation to "walk in the Light of the Lord"?

Is our public opinion—I do not say the opinion of men who fear and serve God, but the opinion of the country at large—in any serious sense a reflection of that Light? What, then, does it say in answer to those very questions as to which man is most interested in arriving at Truth? Is this world or the next the best worth living for? Is the material or the moral in human life really the more precious? Is success without virtue, or virtue without success, intrinsically the better thing? What does public opinion say as to questions like these? Does it not tell us that a high ideal of conduct is unpractical and foolish, and that we had better get rid of it if it should haunt our national conscience? Does it not turn a deaf ear and a blind eye to the sores which fester beneath the surface of life, and lay much stress upon the paint and gilding of the social fabric? Is it not persuaded that all will practically go on, to the end of time, as it does now; with changes, indeed, originated and directed by successive generations of men, but without any great overwhelming interference from Above,—winding up the whole order of human life, burying in one vast grave all that we call society?

Is it not to be feared that men are increasingly turning away from the Divine Light revealing God, sin, and judgment? Is not all that can make society feel independent of God, all that can relieve man from the overwhelming sense of indebtedness which a creature must feel towards his Creator, eagerly made the most of? Is not all that softens down the idea of sin, and that makes it look like

a pardonable, if not exactly a virtuous, form of human activity, actively welcomed? Is not all that whispers of a coming Judgment too often silenced, scouted, denounced as a lingering superstition? It has been said that few men about town would care to confess in one of the clubs at the West End that they really believed in the Day of Judgment. What is this but saying that men are afraid, at least in some classes of society, to make head against this false, misleading enlightenment—to reject its deceptive glare that they may "walk in the Light of the Lord"?

Let us begin, brethren, each with himself. The Light of the Lord teaches every soul upon which it falls that it too, like Israel of old, has an ideal of what it might be, of what it was meant to be, fully formed in the Mind of God, and more or less set before it through the events and teaching of life. Apart from the solemn thoughts which come with early instruction in the Faith, and in the Will and ways of God, there are all the special sources of light and guidance which the love of parents, the examples of friends, the teaching of books, the teaching of bereavements, the teaching of pain in all its forms, supply to each one of us. No one soul has exactly the same ideal put before it as any other; because no two souls are exactly alike, just as no two birds, no two flowers, are exactly alike. The boundless resources of God are seen in His infinite power of varying individual forms and destinies; and we feel that His Love can perfectly condescend to any of us while it embraces us all, as we study what He has taught us, one by one, of our intended place and work in His Universe or His Kingdom. Alas! multitudes of men miss, have missed, that teaching; grovelling in the dust like the countrymen of Isaiah, and forgetting that they had ever been bidden to rise

to Heaven, and taught how to do it! Brethren, how is it with us?

Every soul, too, is taught, sooner or later, by God's Light falling on it, its load of secret sin. When that lesson is learnt, the true servants of God exclaim with St. John, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."[a] When that lesson is learnt, you and I feel and know, as Christians, that we have no other place or hope on earth save at the Feet of the Crucified. But though it is the very work of the Comforter to convince the world of sin,[b] what multitudes, in the bosom of Christendom, escape or resist the conviction! Like the Israel of Isaiah's day, "hearing they hear, and do not understand; seeing they see, and do not perceive."[c] The shadow and the light, the sweet and the bitter, the good and the evil, are to them the same, or seem so to shade off into each other as to be practically the same. Good health, easy circumstances, a larger circle of friends, high animal spirits,—these things blind men to the realities of their position, the realities which do not meet the eye. Alas! how terrible to miss this most painful yet most healthful revelation of the Light of the Lord, penetrating our inmost consciences, and revealing that on which we cannot look without pain and shame; the Light which falls with an unsparing love on all the dark spots of secret life, and shows us to ourselves as we are before we meet God and Angels and men in the Day of the Judgment!

For this conviction of the necessity, the certainty, of Judgment, is the third lesson taught to every soul by the Divine Light. To know what we were meant to be and what we are, is to know that we must be judged. God would not be just if it could be otherwise. "I am being judged by the All-seeing One," the illuminated soul

[a] 1 St. John i. 8. [b] St. John xvi. 8. [c] Isa. vi. 9; St. Matt. xiii. 14.

says constantly to itself. "I shall be judged openly before men and Angels, at a day still hidden in the secrets of Eternity, but which will at last enter into time. All the triumphs of my life, all its successes, its confessed failures, its public humiliations, will be to me then as nothing. I shall be among the myriads; yet I shall be alone, with One Being only before me—my Judge, my God." There is that within us which echoes this conviction as a certainty; as it did in the soul of Felix, who, when Paul reasoned of judgment to come, could not but tremble.[a] Well will it be for us if we welcome this conviction now: if it do not break upon us for the first time, in all its terror, when we feel the cold hand of death already laid upon us, and it is too late for preparation and repentance!

Go home, my brethren, and read on your knees this second chapter of Isaiah. Ask God to teach you, by His Spirit, what that chapter says to you. Try to keep Advent in the spirit of that chapter, with its stern yet merciful language ringing in your ears, buried deep in your memory. Such a revelation of Judgment, if it stood alone, might crush the heart of a sinful man down to the very depths of despair; it would do this if it were not accompanied by another revelation which makes it more than bearable. Our knowledge of the opportunities we have lost; of what, by God's grace, we might have been; of what, through our own fault and perverseness, we are; our deep, humbling sense of present sin and weakness of purpose;—all this, leading up to the conviction that God will surely require an account of all, would be too much for us, too much for our aching heads and sinking hearts, did we not know that in our Judge Himself we may, if we will, find and claim our Saviour. As it is, the Light of the Lord, with

[a] Acts xxiv. 25.

all its humbling revelations, is not intolerable for Christians, because upon the very Throne of Judgment there will be seated the Eternal Mercy; because the Hand which at the last will guide the Angels on their errands of justice, is the Hand which was pierced for the Redemption of the lost.

SERMON V.

THE LAW OF DEATH.

(SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT.)

HEB. IX. 27.

It is appointed unto men once to die.

THE general truth which, last Sunday, we were looking at in outline, and in the perspectives of history, admits of, and indeed requires, a nearer study, if we are to bring it home to our personal life. The life of the individual, like the life of nations, involving as it does a contrast between the ideal or law of duty on the one side, and wilful wrong-doing on the other, leads up to judgment as its necessary issue. This conclusion can only be escaped from by a denial, I will not say of the truths of Revelation, but of the primary and most healthy instincts and decisions of our moral sense. But then the question arises, What are the limits of our probation; where is the gate of the Hall of Judgment? This question is answered in the Apostolic statement that "it is appointed unto men once to die, and after that the judgment."

I.

Now, what is here meant by "death"?

Three kinds of death are mentioned in Holy Scripture.

Death may be physical; it may be spiritual; it may be eternal.

1. Physical or natural death consists in the separation of the soul and the body. St. Paul speaks of death as a dissolution, in writing about his own death to the Philippians during his first imprisonment, and to Timothy during his second. "I have a desire to be dissolved," [a] he says in one place; "The time of my departure (it should be, 'of my dissolution') is at hand," [b] in the other. The idea of death which this expression involves, is that of a severance between the natural and the spiritual parts of man's complex being; just as the body itself, when the vital principle has deserted it, is chemically resolved into its constituent elements. When writing to the Corinthians, St. Paul speaks of death as "our earthly house of this tabernacle being destroyed or dissolved." [c] Here he is thinking of the soul as the personal, enduring being, as the real man, who is lodged for a while in the bodily tent or envelope, and passes out of it at death. St. Peter says of himself, "As long as I am in this tabernacle, I think it right to put you in remembrance." [d] Here St. Peter treats his body as a tent, within which his soul will dwell for a little time until its curtains are rent by the martyrdom which awaited him. When, after this dissolution has taken place, Scripture accompanies our thoughts about the body, "Dust," it says, "thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return;" [e] or, "The dust shall return unto earth as it was." [f] When it guides us into the unseen world with the soul, it speaks of death as a reunion with our deceased ancestors, or, as a return to the God Who gave it Being. Death, for Moses, is sleep among his fathers; [g]

[a] Phil. i. 23. [b] 2 Tim. iv. 6. [c] 2 Cor. v. 1. [d] 2 St. Pet. i. 13.
[e] Gen. iii. 19. [f] Eccles. xii. 7. [g] Deut. xxxi. 16.

the ruler's daughter is said by our Lord to be "not dead;" she only "sleeps."[a] The dead who die in the Lord are pronounced "blessed" by the Spirit, Who teaches the Church in the Apocalypse; "they rest from their labours."[b]

2. Next, there is a twofold death of the soul. The servants of God die to the instincts of the old nature; they are, by a voluntary act, "crucified with Christ." "Our old man is crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be destroyed."[c] "How shall we," asks St. Paul, "that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?"[d] The business of Christians is to "mortify," or, 'put to death,' "their members that are upon the earth."[e] "Christ," says St. Peter, "bare our sins in His own Body on the tree of the Cross, that we, being dead to sin, might live unto righteousness."[f]

But spiritual death of another kind is possible on this side the grave. When a soul has sinned grace away, and the Holy Spirit abandons it, that soul becomes incapable of good; at least, for the time being, and in the absence of a new and extraordinary turning to God. St. John the Apostle says, with reference to this, that "there is a sin unto death,"[g] for which he will not enjoin prayers; and St. Paul reminds the Ephesians that, before their conversion to Christ, they had been "dead in trespasses and sins."[h]

3. Once more, there is eternal death. Our Lord calls this "destruction," to which the broad gate and the broad way lead directly;[i] and St. Paul says to the Philippians, of the sensualists who are enemies of the Cross of Christ, that "their end is destruction;"[j] and to the Thessalonians,

[a] St. Luke viii. 52. [b] Rev. xiv. 13. [c] Rom. vi. 6. [d] *Ib.* 2.
[e] Col. iii. 5. [f] 1 St. Pet. ii. 24. [g] 1 St. John v. 16.
[h] Eph. ii. 1. [i] St. Matt. vii. 13. [j] Phil. iii. 19.

that those who do not obey the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ will be punished with an "everlasting ruin," or, "destruction" (it is a different word), radiating from the Face of the Lord in judgment;[a] and St. John alludes to this as "the second death," which, he says, has no power over those who have had part in the "first" or 'spiritual' "resurrection"[b] from sin, and the scene of which he identifies with "the lake of fire."[c] There is no reason for supposing that Scripture means by eternal death, the destruction of the personal being of the lost: that supposition would not be entertained by persons familiar with the use of the words employed to describe it. And our Lord's references to "the worm that dieth not," and to "the fire that never shall be quenched,"[d] certainly oblige us to think, not of enduring annihilation, but of a perpetuated state of penal misery. This state is, in fact, the prolongation into Eternity of a spiritual death, which is begun in time; just as the Life of the Blessed in Heaven is the prolongation of an Eternal Life, begun here amid the scenes of time, into the world beyond the grave—into Eternity. We here become what we shall be; only a condition which in this life may be almost infinitely modified becomes, beyond the grave, fixed and irrevocable.

Of these three senses of death—the physical, the spiritual, the eternal—the text certainly does not refer to the last; since, so far is it from being "appointed unto men once to die" in this sense, that "God will have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth."[e] Nor does it refer to the death of the regenerate to sin and to the world; since, although such a death as this is God's Will, antecedently, for all of us, it does not, as a matter of fact, take place universally, and it may

[a] 2 Thess. i. 9. [b] Rev. xx. 6. [c] *Ib.* 14.
[d] St. Mark ix. 44, 46, 48. [e] 1 Tim. ii. 4.

have to be repeated, during life, several times. The death which is here in question is neither spiritual nor yet independent of time; it it of death in the literal everyday sense of the word that the Apostle says, "It is appointed unto men once to die."

II.

Let us consider the statement in itself. It affirms a Universal Law. "What man is he that liveth, and shall not see death?"[a] is a question which would be answered now just as it would have been answered in the ages when the Psalmist asked it. No class, no age, no favoured race, no profession initiated into the secrets of the highest science, can hope to claim exemption. Certainly there are recorded exceptions—just one or two—in Sacred History. Enoch was translated, we are told, to the unseen world, without submitting to the pains of death;[b] Elijah went up by a chariot into Heaven;[c] and when our Lord comes to judge the quick and the dead, the former class—the quick, or living—according to St. Paul, will be changed, without dying, at the Revelation of His Presence. "We shall not all sleep"—in death—"but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we"—the living, if we are still here—"shall be changed. For," he adds, "this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality."[d] Still, until that great and awful innovation upon all that will have been seen before takes place, the Law of death holds good for all; the earlier exceptions do but prove the rule. The very Lord of Life Himself became voluntarily "obedient unto

[a] Ps. lxxxix. 48.
[b] Heb. xi. 5.
[c] 2 Kings ii. 11.
[d] 1 Cor. xv. 51–53.

death, even the death of the Cross;" [a] and we know that no strength, or skill, or anxious precautions can elude its grasp. Death is certain; "it is appointed unto men once to die."

How do we account for this great Law? It is, says our Science, a law of Nature; it is an inevitable incident in the chemical development of an animal organism. From the moment of our birth we carry within us the seeds and the secret of our dissolution. The history of a single man is but that of a ripple in the ocean, in the vast, gradual, never-ceasing process of growth and decay, of combination, and dissolution, and recombination, whereby, in this wonderful Universe of being, life is being perpetually forfeited and as perpetually renewed. The law may operate in a few months, or only at the close of a century; it may be delayed by precautions which interrupt the action of the causes which would more immediately precipitate it; it may be prematurely enforced through the rapid development of some latent poison or weakness in the system. But in the end it will have its way, do what we will, go where we will, consult whom we may. Unless accident or violence anticipates this work of inward decay, our bodies, too, will, in time, go to pieces, just as surely as do the animals and trees around us. We carry within us the presentiment of our future; we shall lie down to die. It is "appointed;" it is a law of Nature.

How do we account for this law of death? It has been called a law of Religion; it were better to have said, a law of Divine Government. We do not deny that death is the term of a process which the chemistry of the human body renders inevitable, because we see in it a great moral act of God; a fact which belongs, in all its highest aspects, to the spiritual world.

[a] Phil. ii. 8.

Death, it has been finely said by a modern writer, is the masterpiece of the Divine Justice. It is a consequence and measure of sin; it is God's way of displaying before our very senses what sin is. Because sin has entered into the heart and marrow of our life; because it lodges itself in those inmost recesses of our complex being where spirit and body find their point of unity, and so is transmitted with the inheritance of life from sire to son; therefore, if sin was to be exposed and vanquished, if it was to be torn out by the very roots from the nature with which it was so closely, so mercilessly interwoven, it was needful that God should sever the bonds which unite soul and body, that He should break up the mould of life which had been so deeply dishonoured in the interests of His enemy. And yet, in doing this, He was only letting sin take its own course. Sin is the germ and principle of death. Death is merely the prolongation into the sphere of physical existence of that disorganization and ruin which sin introduces into the sphere of spiritual life; it is destruction spreading downwards from a higher to a lower department of being; like a fire which has broken out in the upper story of a palace, and which enwraps in its fury the floors and chambers beneath.

St. Paul accordingly says that "by one man sin entered into the world, and death"—that is, physical, as well as moral, death—"by sin;"[a] death has passed upon all men, "even upon those who have not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression."[b] If Adam had not sinned he would not have died; his death was foretold as a consequence of sin while yet he was innocent. "Of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die."[c] Nor is death here exclusively spiritual

[a] Rom. v. 12. [b] *Ib.* 14. [c] Gen. iii. 3.

death; the sentence upon Adam, "Dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return,"[a] makes such an interpretation impossible. Accordingly, when, in the year of our Lord 418, the African Bishops assembled at Carthage to consider the denial of the fall of man and of the power of God's Grace, by Pelagius, they condemned the statement that Adam was made mortal in such sense that, whether he sinned or did not sin, he would have to die—not because his sin had deserved death, but from a pure necessity of his nature. This decision, that Adam was gifted with immortality before he sinned, embodies the doctrine both of the New Testament and of the Church of Christ upon the subject; but it is notoriously exposed to some objections which we may consider in passing.

For instance, modern geology goes about the world in the wake of our practical engineers, and in the company of our mountain-climbers and explorers, noting the fossil remains in every rock and soil that it can inspect; turning up the shingle in every river-bed; sorting and cataloguing the contents of every mountain cavern. I am as far as possible from wishing to speak disrespectfully of its efforts; for if it has to revise its main conclusions about once in ten or fifteen years, it adds so largely to our knowledge of the works of God and of the history of our own race, that we may well be grateful to it. But when some of its representatives come to us with their hands full of what they tell us are human bones which, judging from the strata in which they are found, must have belonged to an age prior to any that, with the utmost chronological liberality, can be assigned to the Adam of Genesis, and then argue that death—human death—must have been much older than Adam, and that St. Paul is mistaken in tracing the origin of its

[a] Gen. iii. 19.

empire to him, we may demur to this inference. Let it be admitted, for the argument's sake, that these bones do belong to beings, in shape very like, almost exactly like ourselves, and of higher antiquity than the Adam of Scripture: this admission does not invalidate St. Paul's statement. It does not grant that these beings, so like men, were really men of the same race as ourselves; not merely of the same general type as Adam, but his actual ancestors. We Christians are not at all concerned to deny that, during the long series of ages which would probably have intervened between the creation of this planet and its occupation by our first ancestor, it may not have been the dwelling-place of other beings, more or less resembling ourselves. For all we know, if they were rational, responsible, and on their probation, they, too, may have failed in that probation and fallen under the law of death, and, finally, have disappeared at the terrible summons of some vast catastrophe which prepared the earth for their successors. This can, of course, only be a matter of conjecture; knowledge in such spheres as this is out of our reach. All that we know is that Adam introduced death into our world of men; that in Paradise he had the endowment of immortality, and that he lost it, for himself and for his children, by his sin; and this statement involves us, I submit, in no necessary conflict with the discoveries of the geologists.

A second objection comes from the speculative chemists. Was not Adam's body, they ask, compacted of exactly the same materials as our own; and must it not, therefore, have been as liable as our own to the disintegrating processes which ultimately issue in death? We cannot suppose, they say, that the laws of chemistry were less imperious in bygone ages than they are now, only because they were then unrecognized. And if this is so, how are

we to regard the story of Adam's immortality by nature, forfeited subsequently by sin, as a serious historical fact; or as anything more than a poetical expression of reverence on the part of our race for its first ancestor, joined to an endeavour to reconcile this ideal account of him with the condition of his descendants?

This objection proceeds upon a misapprehension as to what is, in fact, the belief of the Christian Church on the subject. The Church does not say—Scripture nowhere says—that God, in making man, made his bodily life immortal; she only says that when man sinned in Paradise he was immortal, and forfeited his immortality by his sin. If the question be raised how man came by this Paradisaical immortality, the answer is, that it was a part of that robe of Grace with which, as if in anticipation of Heaven, after his creation, he was clothed in Eden, only that he was free to lose it if he would.[b] If men ask, further, how Supernatural Grace could confer immortality upon a physical frame, the answer, again, is, that Grace is merely one form of the action of the Almighty, and that He can do as He wills. If we believe that hereafter He will raise our bodies from the dust, we can understand that He may have given to, and withdrawn from, our ancestor, during life, that quality of incorruption[a] which will hereafter be bestowed on the rising dead. The question behind is, of course, whether God has this power over the natural world; a question upon which those who believe Him to be a Living and All-powerful Being, and those who do not, will take opposite sides. But, at least, the Christian account of Adam's immortality in Paradise is not open to the objections of some modern chemists; because the Faith does not trace this immortality to any necessary quality of Adam's physical frame, but to a

[a] 1 Cor. xv. 53. [b] Cf. Bishop Bull, *State of Man before the Fall.*

superadded endowment, the forfeiture of which forfeited all that it involved besides itself. Adam's immortality, you observe, was never a fixed and absolute immortality, but a relative and conditioned immortality. It was not an immortality inaccessible to death, as is that of the blessed in Heaven; it depended upon his moral faithfulness, and in the event it was lost.

After the chemists come some moral philosophers; and they ask us how it is reconcilable with God's Justice thus to involve an entire race in the consequences of the sin of an ancestor; how it can be right, in a prophet's words, that the children's teeth should thus be set on edge because the fathers have eaten sour grapes?[a] To this I answer, that every human being may be regarded under two aspects. He is a personal unit, utterly severed from all besides; and he is a member of a race, affecting other members of the race in numberless ways, and being similarly affected by them. Certain it is that God regards man under these two aspects, in nature and in Revelation. Our ultimate destiny, as individuals, for weal or woe depends upon our personal faithfulness to light and grace; upon what St. Paul calls[b] our obeying the Gospel. But we are also bound up with, we cannot dissociate ourselves from, other human beings, especially those from whom we receive, and who derive from us, the gift of life. Thus the Apostle shows how, through the fact of Abraham's paying tithes to Melchizedek, Levi, as Abraham's descendant, was implicitly involved in this acknowledgment of the superiority of Melchizedek's priesthood.[c] And every one of us is in numberless ways bound by obligations which are imposed upon him by the action of his ancestors. It was at once the dignity and the peril of Adam's unique position that he had it in his power to

[a] Ezek. xviii. 2. [b] Rom. i. 5; x. 16. [c] Heb. vii. 9, 10.

compromise us all on an unequalled scale. And he did so. Adam sinned. Adam could not transmit to his children the great gift which he had lost; and in his person man, stripped of his robe of Supernatural Grace, fell to a lower level, and became subject to nature and to the laws of average animal life. No parent can hand on to his child faculties higher than his own. Many a parent, as we know, bequeaths to his children a constitution enfeebled by his own excesses; a legacy of pain and weakness which he himself has earned. People who reject the revealed doctrine of original sin transmitted, by the loss of Grace, from our first parent to all his descendants, cannot deny the plainest facts of human physiology; they must either deny God's Justice in the laws of Nature, or admit it in the teaching of Revelation.

The answer to these moral philosophers is, that the Maker of mankind has a right to impose on us this twofold condition; to regard us as a race forming an organic whole, and not merely as a collection of perfectly separated individuals. Especially He has this right when He has provided a remedy for our inherited disadvantages; when the effect of the sinful act of Adam may be more than counterbalanced through our claiming our share in the Satisfaction and Obedience of Jesus Christ. If it should be asked, further, why those who believe and are baptized, and are thus united to Christ, the Conqueror of Death, are not exempt from this stern penalty, the answer is twofold. Immortality is the privilege of a strictly perfect obedience, and in the regenerate there is a remaining predisposition to, and element of, sin which still forfeits it. But, secondly, in a Christian, if the fact of death remains, the sting and humiliation is gone. Death has been transfigured on Calvary; it has lost its penal character; it is no longer the entrance to the

gloomy vaults of a sunless under-world; it is the Gate of Life. "To me," said St. Paul, "to die is gain."[a] "The death of the just," says St. Chrysostom, "retains nothing but the name; nay, the very name is gone; it is only sleep."[b]

III.

A few words, in conclusion, on the practical bearings of this fact—"it is appointed unto men once to die."

It teaches us what is our true, our highest, work in life. We live that we may prepare to die; we are sent into this world that we may make ready to leave it. For the one great certainty before all of us is this; we shall die. No young man entering on life knows whether he will live his half-century, or will die in a few months, or weeks, or days. He knows not whether he will be wealthy, honoured, prosperous, influential, or whether he will pass his life in poverty, obscurity, failure, insignificance. He knows not whether, after years of robust health, he will pass out of life suddenly, amid the crash of a railway accident, or beneath the timbers of his burning home, or whether he will approach the last conflict up the long avenue of some preparatory disease, such as consumption, which, from the spiritual opportunities which it has so often afforded to careless souls, our neighbours across the Channel have happily termed "the death of the predestinated." He knows not whether he will see the friends of his boyhood pass away before himself, one after another, into the Unseen, or whether

[a] Phil. i. 21.

[b] The passage occurs in his beautiful Homily preached on Good Friday, A.D. 392, at Antioch. Ἐπειδὴ δὲ ἦλθεν ὁ Χριστὸς, καὶ ὑπὲρ ζωῆς τοῦ κόσμου ἀπέθανε, οὐκέτι θάνατος καλεῖται λοιπὸν ὁ θάνατος, ἀλλὰ ὕπνος καὶ κοίμησις. —*De Cœmet. et Cruce*, opp. ii. 470, ed. Gaume.

he himself will take the lead in the long, inevitable procession. All the circumstances which surround death, the manner of dying, the time of dying, the scene of death, are for all of us utterly uncertain. But the fact that we shall individually die, is absolutely certain; its certainty stands out in weird contrast with the varied uncertainties that surround it.

It is certain that we shall die; and in death we shall be, each of us, alone. We may have friends around our bedside, doing all that love and grief can do to alleviate pain and to assure us of the tenderest human sympathy; friends who may accompany us up to the very Gate of Death, but from whom we must part at last. In the last mental act, by which man, driven back upon the centre of his being, takes leave of this world of sense and time, and parts by a wrench, more or less evident, from the body which has hitherto, from the first moment of existence, been at once the envelope and the instrument of his real self—he will be, he must be, alone. None other can enter into that tremendous experience which awaits us all; when one world disappears from sight, and another, so unimaginable to us now, so magnificent, so awful, opens upon it. Pascal's saying, "I shall be alone in death," is one of the most useful that a man can keep in his memory, or rather, can repeat to himself, in the privacy of his home, every morning and evening of his life.

To prepare for death, then, is the true work, the common sense of life. And how are we to set about it? There are four main lines of such preparation.

a. There is the discipline of resignation. Death will be a sentence against which no appeal can be heard. It may seem hard to part with so many friends, so many

interests, so much work, so many hopes and enthusiasms. But there is no help for it. And it is better, for our own sakes, as still more for the honour of God, to bow to the inevitable, instead of imitating on our deathbeds those unhappy criminals who are said from time to time to engage in a struggle with the stern ministers of human law upon the very steps of the scaffold. The great laws by which God governs the Universe will not, we may take it for granted, be repealed in our favour; we have but to acknowledge and to submit to them, or rather, to Him Whose rules of work they are. After all, we are in the hands, not of a dead, unfeeling force, but of a Most Tender Father, Whom we well may trust. And we prepare for this last act of self-resignation to Him by many previous acts of resignation; by readily, joyfully yielding up our wills, when we have to suffer what we do not like; by treating each personal annoyance, each failure, each illness, each loss of friends or means, as a step in that training which is wholesome for men who have to die, and who should learn to say, in prospect of the last agony, "Not my will, but Thine, be done."[a]

β. There is the discipline of repentance. Resignation is only difficult, death is only formidable, because our consciences, as well as our creed, assure us that death will be followed by judgment. And judgment is a dreadful anticipation for a sinner. "The sting of death," says St. Paul, "is sin."[b] To appear before God, laden with that which is a contradiction of His Nature, which He hates and will punish, not out of any personal vindictiveness, but because He cannot lay aside His unalterable Sanctity and Justice—this is, indeed, a prospect from

[a] St. Luke xxii. 42. [b] 1 Cor. xv. 56.

which the stoutest heart might shrink. "I don't mind the pain of dying," it was once said; "but I cannot bear to think of the Face of the Judge." And yet this need not be; in a Christian's case it ought not to be. For "there is no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit;" [a] and if we Christians "confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." [b] Only, the work of repentance, to be deep and real, must be lifelong. Day by day the Christian must deplore all in the past that has separated him from God. Day by day he must form and strengthen resolutions against sin, against relapse, against temptation. Day by day he must plead the merits of the Divine Victim Who was crucified for sinners, and Whose Blood, as being that of the Everlasting Son of God, "cleanseth us from all sin." [c]

γ. Thirdly, there is the discipline of prayer, or to speak more accurately, of worship. No doubt worship is a means of grace. It puts us in possession of spiritual powers otherwise unattainable, so far as we know. It has wider results when it takes the energetic forms of supplication and intercession, and asks and receives blessings, temporal and spiritual, from the Source of all good. But, apart from these possible effects, an act of worship is of itself a training for our life beyond the grave, and for the great change which leads to it. In sincere worship, we shut out the things and thoughts of sense and time, we cleanse the inner temple of the tables of the money-changers, and of the seats of them that sell doves; [d] we cleanse it, if need be, by a stern effort of the will. When

[a] Rom. viii. 1.
[b] 1 St. John i. 9.
[c] *Ib.* 7.
[d] St. Matt. xxi. 12.

we enter thus, in spirit, in the train of our Great High Priest, within the veil, and behold the realities over which death has no power, and which have no relation to time; the Everlasting Throne, the Unending Intercession, the countless intelligences who worship and who serve, their ceaseless and consummate activity which is a perpetual rest; we are not only insensibly suffused with the light which streams from that other world; we learn how to behave ourselves in that Majestic Presence. We learn the manners of another climate, the habits of a higher Society, before our time. Thus worship is a training for death. Each sincere act of worship involves that self-detachment from the world which will be a necessity for the dying; each sincere act of worship trains the soul to gaze beforehand on the sights and sounds which will burst on it, in all their awe and beauty, as it crosses the threshold of Eternity.

δ. Finally, there is the discipline of voluntary sacrifice. By sacrifice man does not merely await death; he goes out to meet, almost to welcome, it. He learns how to transfigure a stern necessity into the sublimest of virtues. His life is not simply to be taken from him; he will offer it to God. For each true act of sacrifice, each surrender of self, whether in will or in act, carries with it the implied power of controlling the whole being, not merely on ordinary occasions, but at the crisis and the trial-time of destiny. Those small and secret self-conquests which make up the daily life of a serious Christian, which seem to achieve so little, are yet of incalculable value. Each is a step in the greatest of all the disciplines which prepare for death. As our Lord, from His earliest years, looked on to that entire Offering of His Human Will which was perfected on the

Cross, so must the Christian, by many a free surrender of that which he desires or loves, prepare himself for the last great act which awaits him; that he may be able to say after the Divine Redeemer, "Into Thy Hands I commend my spirit;"[a] while he adds, as becomes a sinner, "for Thou hast redeemed me, O Lord, Thou God of Truth."[b]

[a] St. Luke xxiii. 46. [b] Ps. xxxi. 6.

SERMON VI.

THE MISSIONARY SPIRIT.

(THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT.)

ST. LUKE XII. 49.

I am come to send fire upon the earth.

AS you know, next Friday has been appointed by the highest authorities in the Church of England to be observed as a day of Special Prayer to God.[a] For some time much anxiety has been felt on the score of our Missions to the heathen, and particularly about the difficulty of providing missionaries to undertake the work. Many speeches have been made on the subject; many articles have been written in newspapers and reviews; colleges have been established, some of them quite recently, with a view to training and educating missionaries; and the societies which undertake to organize and to stimulate efforts of this description have not been less active than in former years. Still it was felt that these agencies did not secure, and were not likely to secure, what was wanted. The subject of Missions, notwithstanding its undeniable importance, was felt only to command a languid interest, even among persons who

[a] Friday, December 20, in the year 1872, was appointed by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York as a Day of Intercession for Missions.

were alive to the claims of Religious Truth; and the efforts to make matters better only presented an uncomfortable contrast to the evidences of their becoming worse. So at last we are going, as a Church, to ask God to help us. Of course all serious Christians would from time to time pray for the success of Christian Missions; indeed, every time that we say in the Lord's Prayer, "Thy Kingdom come," we pray for the extension of Christ's kingdom through these as well as other means. Now, however, as a united Church, we are going to utter, with one heart and one voice, a great cry for help; to ask God to do for us, in us, by us, that which of ourselves we cannot do. Much depends upon the earnestness and unanimity of the effort. Here, in St. Paul's, besides celebrations of the Holy Communion, and the usual morning and evening services, there will be a special office which has been prescribed by authority for use in this Diocese. The Bishop of London will take the lead in the intercessions offered by his flock, and will address us from this pulpit, with the authority which belongs to our chief Pastor, on the nature and duties of the occasion.

Meanwhile, it is in obedience to his published instructions that I proceed to draw attention to the subject today. For the appointed day is not meant to be a day of many sermons; it should be a day of much prayer. If the effort is to be worthy of the needs which have prompted it, God will be addressed on that day rather than man; man, only so far as may be necessary to urge him to turn his face upwards in prayer to God. But if this is to be the case, people must, so far as they can, have made arrangements beforehand. They must arrange, when possible, to lay out their time with a view to taking part in this spiritual work. And, still more, they must review their thoughts, their wishes, their hopes and fears on the

subject before them, so that they may know exactly what they mean to ask for, and how to ask for it.

What, then, is to be the main subject of our prayers to God next Friday? We are told that the great need of Missions is men; that Missions are languishing or even failing for want of missionaries. We have to pray, then, for the spread and strengthening of the missionary spirit in the Church. There is a spirit or temper which produces missionaries, just as the military spirit in a country produces great generals, and the æsthetic spirit great artists. Properly speaking, the Church of Christ is the one great Missionary Society; over her gates we read from age to age the inscription traced in her Founder's parting words, "Go, make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."[a] If she could cease to be missionary, she would be utterly untrue to Christ's plainest commands. The missionary spirit does not by any means only become actual missionaries; it should be the spirit of all serious Christians who have the True Faith and our Lord's honour at heart. Every true Christian is a missionary in intention, within such limits as the duties of his state of life make possible; although he may never have seen a heathen in his life. Every true Christian has in him the spirit of the martyrs, although he may never be called on to witness his faith with his blood. For the wish to spread the knowledge and love of Jesus Christ must be a strong impulse in any man or woman who really knows and loves Him; although to do this among the heathen may require special aptitudes, and indeed a special vocation from God the Holy Ghost. And yet surely at some time or other all true disciples of Christ hear in their hearts those thrilling words which

[a] St. Matt. xxviii. 19.

we sing in the *Benedictus:* "Thou, Child, shalt be called a prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways; to give knowledge of salvation unto His people for the remission of their sins, through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the Day Star from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death."[a] The absence of any anxiety for the spread of the Truth implies spiritual paralysis, if not spiritual death. The man who knows the happiness of "peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,"[b] cannot but desire that others should share it. And this desire in its higher and stronger forms is one of the greatest gifts of God to His Church; it is that Divine enthusiasm of which our Lord Jesus Christ said, "I am come to send fire upon the earth."

It is impossible to mistake the symbolical importance attributed in the Bible to the element of fire. God appeared to Moses in a flame of fire in a bush;[c] and the Lawgiver refers to this in words quoted in the New Testament, "Thy God is a consuming Fire."[d] Fire, then, is a symbol of God's essential Nature, of the light and warmth of Uncreated Love. "God," says St. John, "*is* Love."[e] Love is not a quality which we can conceive Him to be without; it is His Very Self. Especially does fire denote the Third Person of the Holy Trinity, Who is the Eternal Bond of Love between the Father and the Son. Thus St. John Baptist says that he himself baptizes with water, "but He that cometh after me . . . shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with Fire."[f] Thus, on the Day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit descended on the Apostles in the Upper Room, He chose tongues of fire as a

[a] St. Luke i. 76-79. [b] Rom. v. 1. [c] Exod. iii. 2.
[d] Heb. xii. 29. [e] 1 St. John iv. 8. [f] St. Matt. iii. 11.

sensible token of His Presence.[a] And our Lord, on Whom the Spirit rested in His Fulness, is all Fire, because He is all Love. His entire Life, His Words, His Sufferings, His Death, express burning love for God and man. This love radiated from Him on all who came in contact with Him. So one of the disciples at Emmaus exclaimed, "Did not our heart burn within us, while He talked with us by the way, and while He opened to us the Scriptures?"[b] Jeremiah had felt a presentiment of this, when pausing before uttering his prophecy against Pashur, the Governor of the Temple: "The Word of the Lord was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones; I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay."[c] And the Psalmist: "While I was musing the fire kindled, and at last I spake with my tongue."[d] And in the same spirit St. Paul, though without the metaphor: "The love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if One died for all, then were all dead: and that He died for all, that they which live should not live unto themselves, but unto Him that died for them, and rose again."[e]

The fire, then, which our Lord came to send was a Divine enthusiasm inspired by His Spirit for the glory of God and the highest good of man; an enthusiasm enwrapping, like flame, all the faculties of the soul, and transfiguring weak and commonplace natures by the purifying and invigorating energy of a supernatural force. "I can do all things," said St. Paul, "through Christ That strengtheneth me."[f] This enthusiasm has undoubtedly many other outlets and effects; but the missionary spirit is one of its chief manifestations; the spirit which burns to carry the Name and Kingdom of Christ wherever there are souls to be saved and blest.

[a] Acts ii. 3, 4. [b] St. Luke xxiv. 32. [c] Jer. xx. 9.
[d] Ps. xxxix. 4. [e] 2 Cor. v. 14, 15. [f] Phil. iv. 13.

What, let us ask, are the elements which go to make up the missionary spirit? What are the convictions by which the Sacred Flame is kept alive within the soul? There are three main elements, three ruling and inspiring convictions, at the root of missionary enthusiasm.

I.

Of these the first is a deep sense of the certainty and importance of the Truths of the Christian Revelation. The Apostles were the first missionaries, and we see in their writings how deeply they felt both the importance and the certainty of their message. St. Paul speaks of "preaching among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ;" [a] he prays that the Ephesians may have "the eyes of their understanding so illuminated, as to know what is the hope to which they are called as Christians, and what the wealth of glory belonging to the inheritance given them by Christ among God's servants, and," pursues the Apostle, in the fulness of his heart, "what the exceeding greatness of His Power to us-ward who believe, proportioned as it is to the working of His mighty power, which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead." [b] When men speak of St. Paul's language as hyperbolical and inflated, they do so only because the great facts which were so vividly present to St. Paul's soul are hidden from their own. If it be indeed true that the Everlasting Son of God emptied Himself of the Glory which He had with the Father before the world was,[c] and took our nature upon Him, and had a human mother, and lived on this earth for thirty-three years, and then died in pain and shame, to rise after death from the grave in which He was laid, and return, still robed in the Nature which had

[a] Eph. iii. 8. [b] *Ib.* i. 18-20. [c] St. John xvii. 5.

died and risen, to the glory of His Heavenly Home—if this be a fact, it is trivial to speak of it as an important fact; it distances in point of importance everything else that ever has occurred in human history. What are all the glories, all the triumphs, all the failures, all the humiliations, all the recoveries of which history speaks, by comparison? What heart have we to dwell on them when we have really stood in spirit face to face with the Incarnation and Passion of the Eternal Son? This is what men like St. Francis Xavier or Henry Martyn have felt; and this sense of the overwhelming importance of the facts of Redemption has not, in the minds of these eminent missionaries, been weakened by any suspicion, created by a sceptical atmosphere of thought around them, of the truth of their Creed. So, too, it had been with the Apostles. "I know Whom I have believed,"[a] cries St. Paul; "We have not followed cunningly devised fables," protests St. Peter, "but were eye-witnesses of His Majesty;"[b] "That which we have seen and heard," says St. John, "declare we unto you; for The Life was manifested, and we have seen It, and declare unto you that Eternal Life Which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us."[c]

In the mind of the Apostles, the truths of the Christian Revelation centred in the living Person of Christ, God and Man; and a devotion to His Person, based on a profound conviction of the certainty of these truths, was the mainspring of that spirit of enterprising charity which went forth to convert the world. To the hearts of these first missionaries, as so constantly since, the Crucified Son of God whispered daily, hourly, "Behold what I have borne for thee; what hast thou done for Me?" Has this first element of the missionary spirit suffered by coming in

[a] 2 Tim. i. 12. [b] 2 St. Pet. i. 16. [c] 1 St. John i. 2, 3.

contact with modern thought? It would be an injustice to say that the cultivated scepticism of our time treats the statements of the Christian Creed as unimportant. Its very cultivation enables it to realize the overwhelming importance of these facts of the Incarnation and Death of the Eternal Son, supposing them to be true. But, then, it whispers more or less distinctly, Are they true? Are they more than probable? May they not be explained in language which makes less demand upon our faith? or may not the old language in which they were stated be emptied of some of its old meaning, if not of all? We have only to listen to the conversation which goes on around us, to read the newspapers or reviews which lie on our tables, to observe, in short, the general current and direction of popular opinion, in order to understand how widely this spirit is at work, how possible it is that we are ourselves deeply, although unconsciously, influenced by it.

Now, whatever else it may or may not do, it is certain that such a spirit has the effect of being fatal to great moral efforts. It eats out the core of those strong, overmastering convictions which are the leverage and strength of such efforts. It breaks up into a few feeble "views" (as men call them) those mighty burning persuasions about truth and falsehood, about happiness and woe, which banish fear and hesitation, and carry the soul imperiously forward into action or into suffering. This is, of course, only one of the many evils which the diseased spirit of doubt inflicts upon the generations which are its victims. But it is obvious that this single effect will account for its energy as a destroyer of missionary enthusiasm. Who would care to be a missionary, or a preacher of any sort, on behalf of a very disputable probability, which might be converted, by the questions of some inquisitive heathen,

into an improbability even in his teacher's mind? Who would go forth with his life in his hand to advocate a religion whose scriptures he believed to be largely forgeries or legends, whose creeds he was willing to mutilate or to disuse, whose evidences seemed to be more and more impaired by the assaults of enemies, whose central Object was becoming, to his apprehension, less and less of a living reality, more and more a mere passing creation of some obsolete phase of thought? No; if a man would be a missionary he must be a downright believer; and if we are to succeed in our proposed supplications to God, we must pray, first of all, for a revival among us of that faith in God and His Message which removes mountains,[a] and which can do all things in the conviction that Christ strengthens us.[b] "Lord, increase our faith,"[c] is the first prayer which should be offered if we are to carry our point.

II.

A second conviction which goes to create missionary enthusiasm is a sense of man's need of Revelation. This sense helped to kindle in the hearts of the Apostles that Sacred Fire which Christ came to send upon the earth. The Apostles did not invest heathenism with the halo of false beauty which has been more or less fashionable in Christendom ever since the Renaissance. They saw in heathendom the kingdom of darkness; its material civilization, its splendid literature, its vast organizations, civil and military, its social and political traditions, were nothing to them, or less than nothing. "We know," said St. John, "that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness;"[d] "All that is in the

[a] St. Matt. xvii. 20.
[b] Phil. iv. 13.
[c] St. Luke xvii. 5.
[d] 1 St. John v. 19.

world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away and the lusts thereof."[a] The highest civilization, so termed, was, in St. Paul's eyes, just as much in need of the Gospel as the rudest types of savage life; he had as much to do for the cultivated heathens who listened to him on the Areopagus at Athens[b] as for the heathen savages in the Mediterranean island, who, in their rude fashion, welcomed him after his shipwreck.[c] For he saw everywhere error and sin; error which obscures the real Nature of God, and the true destiny and interest of man; and sin which makes man God's enemy, the antagonist of the essential Nature of the Perfect Being. The conviction that those who are not in Christ are lost—lost unless they can be brought to Him to be illuminated,[d] to be gifted with a new nature,[e] to be washed, to be sanctified, to be justified[f] before the All-holy,—this was the second element of the inspired passion which urged the Apostles onwards through the world even to martyrdom in their labours for its conversion.

Now, this second element of the missionary spirit is attacked on two sides by the sceptical or rationalistic spirit. That spirit first of all exaggerates the elements of truth to be discovered in heathen religions. It does not merely say with St. Paul that God speaks to man everywhere in some sense, through nature and conscience;[g] it sees in each form of heathen belief a revelation pretty nearly as true as, or not much more erroneous than, the Faith of the Church. It would be easy to point to passages in recent writers which would illustrate this; but

[a] 1 St. John ii. 16, 17. [b] Acts xvii. 22–31. [c] *Ib.* xxviii. 1, 2.
[d] Eph. i. 17, 18. [e] *Ib.* ii. 3–5; 1 St. Pet. i. 4. [f] 1 Cor. vi. 11.
[g] Rom. i. 18–20.

the fact must be sufficiently notorious to those who pay attention to what is thought and said at the present day. Christianity is itself treated as merely one of a group of religions, each containing more or less truth, each containing more or less error. And when this is believed, it is clear that a Mission from Christianity to Moslems or Hindoos must wear the aspect of an impertinence. One conglomerate of truth and error cannot without immodesty address another conglomerate of truth and error, as if it alone had a monopoly of the Revealed Mind of God. The heathen have, after all, it is urged, a great deal of truth in their creeds, and we Christians, who have our full share of error in ours, have no right to attempt to interfere with those rival superstitions, so historical, so ancient, so respectable, so interesting.

The Christian sense of the need of Revelation for those who have it not is also undermined by the disposition to disguise the real nature of sin. Sin is often regarded as only a form of creaturely weakness; as a thing to be pitied, never to be punished, by a benevolent God. And so, just as a kind-hearted gentleman forgives a rudeness, whether it be apologized for or not, God will, upon this hypothesis, forgive adultery, and lying, and blasphemy, and murder, as a matter of good-nature, and in virtue of the one attribute which it is convenient to recognize in Him—an easy-going benevolence. The only sins which are considered grave are those which are hostile to the well-being of human society; but, then, these are punished by society, and that is enough. The idea of treating sins of intention and thought, sins of the intellect and of the affections, sins of desire which never emerge into visible action, as ruinous, is deemed a foolish, morbid imagination, which advancing culture will banish from the world. Heathen sin is veiled beneath apologetic phrases which

almost imply sympathy; it is not so serious, after all. The hideous vices which disfigured the refined and intellectual society of ancient Athens are spoken of gently as the "product of a different moral sentiment from that which prevails in modern Europe." With this estimate of sin, where is the need of a Redeemer Who should blot out its guilt [a] and destroy its power? [b] And what is the justification of the enthusiasm of an Apostolic Christian for proclaiming the sinlessness of Christ as the Model of mankind, the power of the Blood of Christ as the Redeemer of mankind, the grace of the Spirit and of the Sacraments of Christ as the Restorer of mankind? Clearly, if sin is so venial, so almost interesting, man will do very well without the Righteousness of Christ.

Ah! if we are to succeed on our Day of Intercession, we must pray for a new and quickened sense of the need which man, lost in the mazes of sin and error, has of a Redeemer to teach and to save him. No natural virtue, no quick aspiring intelligence, no splendid and glittering civilization, no refined society, can bridge over the chasm which, apart from Christ, yawns between God and man. Too often, alas! our eyes are holden that we should not discern the realities of the world of spirit, while we see clearly what is true in the world of society and the world of matter. "Lord, open our eyes that we may see."

III.

A third conviction which mainly fosters the missionary spirit is a belief in the capacity of every man for salvation through Christ. As God "will have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth," [c]

[a] Acts iii. 19, 20; 1 St. John i. 7. [b] Rom. vi. 6; 1 St. John iii. 8.
[c] 1 Tim. ii. 4.

so every human soul has that in it which, under the action of God's Holy Spirit, can receive the Truth which saves. Intellectual dulness, want of imagination, want of what people are now calling "sweetness and light," even want of moral fervour and quickness, are not barriers. Doubtless some minds, some natures, some souls, present more points of contact with the Gospel than others; some present very few indeed. But no child of man is so constituted as to be incapable of receiving the Truth; and the true missionary knows that if he can only get deep enough beneath the crust of habit formed by sensuality, by indifference, by prejudice, he will at length find a home for Truth and faculties which will welcome it. Nelson used to tell young midshipmen entering the navy that they ought, every one of them, to look forward, as a matter of course, to commanding the Channel fleet, or at least a line-of-battle ship. And this faith in the high possibility of success is still more necessary for the Christian missionary. He should look upon every child of man as bearing within him capacities for greatness which have only to be roused and developed by the Grace of God.

This faith in man, or rather, in what man may be made by Grace, is assailed by modern writers on the ground that character and circumstances are too imperious to be set aside; that they make us what we are; and that it is folly to think of overruling them by the action of any truth on the understanding or of any hidden force upon the will. This is not a new idea. The learned physician Galen, who wrote in the third century of our era, and who, as a heathen, was strongly prejudiced against the Church of Christ, remarks with reference to the education of children, "The cultivator can never succeed in making the thorns bear grapes; for the nature of the thorn is from the first incapable of such improvement."

And then he goes on to say, that "if the vines which are capable of bearing grapes be neglected, they will either produce bad fruit or none at all."[a] Here he marks out what, in his opinion, can really be done with human nature; natural dispositions can be improved, but nothing can be done to supply natural deficiencies. Tertullian, an eminent Christian writer of the period, in his treatise on the Human Soul, admits that "the bad tree will bring forth no fruit if it be not grafted, and a good tree will produce bad fruit unless it be cultivated." Nature unaided will yield no good. But Tertullian knows of a new agency that is at work among men. "The stones," he says, "will become children of Abraham if they are formed to the faith of Abraham; and the generation of vipers will bring forth fruits meet for repentance if they expel the malignant poison. For this," he adds, "is the power of Divine Grace, which is indeed more powerful than nature."[b] The heathen Celsus probably expressed a general opinion among his friends when he stated that it was literally impossible to improve a man who had grown old in vice.[c] Before his conversion, St. Cyprian, who was afterwards Bishop of Carthage and a Martyr for Christ, had held it to be impossible to transform natural habit. How he learnt the power of God's Grace he tells us in a most remarkable passage of one of his extant letters. "Receive," he writes to a correspondent, "that which must be experienced before it can be understood. When I lay in the darkness, in the depth of night; when

[a] Galen, *Op.*, vol. ix. p. 52, ed. Kühne. Quoted by Lulhardt, *Apol. Vorles.*

[b] *De Anima*, c. xxi.: "Non dabit enim arbor mala bonos fructus, si non inseratur, et bona malos dabit, si non colatur. Et lapides filii Abrahæ fient, si in fidem Abrahæ formentur. Et genimina viperarum fructum pœnitentiæ facient, si venena malignitatis exspuerint. Hæc erit vis divinæ gratiæ, potentior utique naturâ."

[c] *Orig. cont. Cels.*, iii. 66 [490], μὴ διδοὺς τοῖς ἁμαρτάνειν πεφυκόσι καὶ τοῦτο πράττειν εἰθισμένοις τὴν παντελῆ μεταβολήν, κ.τ.λ.

I was tossed hither and thither by the billows of the world, and wandered about with an uncertain and fluctuating course, I deemed it a matter of extreme difficulty that any one could be born again, lay aside what he was before, and, although his corporal nature remained the same, could become in soul and disposition another man. 'How,' said I, 'can there be so great a transformation that a man should all at once lay aside what is innate from his very organization, or through habit has become a second nature? How should a man learn frugality who has been accustomed to luxuries? How should he who has been clad in gold and purple condescend to simpler attire? A man who has been surrounded with public honours will not take to privacy; he will not exchange troops of admiring dependents for voluntary solitude. The allurements of sense, again, are very tenacious; intemperance, pride, anger, ambition, lust, must, when once indulged, perforce retain their hold.' So I often said to myself. For, in truth, I was entangled in the errors of my former life, and did not believe that I could be freed from them; so I complied with the vices which cleaved to me, and, in despair of amendment, submitted to my evil inclinations, as if they were part of my nature. But when the stain of my former life had been washed out by Christ in the laver of regeneration, a pure and serene light was poured into my reconciled heart; when the Second Birth received from heaven through the Spirit had changed me into a new man, things formerly doubtful were confirmed in a wonderful manner; what had been closed became open; what had been dark was illuminated; power was given to do what had seemed difficult; and what I had deemed impossible became possible. I can see now that my former life, being of carnal origin, and spent in sin, was an earthly life: the life which the Holy Ghost has

kindled in me is a life from God."[a] This testimony has been re-echoed by thousands of Christians. And, therefore, the barriers of habit, enshrined within venerable traditions, which Christian missionaries encounter in China or in India, however serious as practical obstacles, are not really insurmountable. By-and-by the Gospel leaven will begin to ferment, and these vast ancient societies will heave and break till they open to the influences of the Gospel, if not so swiftly, yet as surely as do the uncultivated New Zealanders and Polynesians. To doubt this is to lose faith, if not in the Gospel, at least in humanity; in the capacity of every human being for coming to the highest Truth revealed to God, in Christ. But such doubt is, alas! sufficiently widespread; and we must pray against it if we would help the cause of Missions.

Certainly these high hopes for our fellow-men have been attacked by those writers, who maintain that the existing races of mankind have no common origin; that the inhabitants of Central Africa and ourselves have no more share in the blood of a common ancestor than have we and the ourang-outangs. If this is the case, if the Africans or the Papuans are really only animals, the phrase, "the human family," is a misleading absurdity. If St. Paul, when speaking at Athens, was wrong, and God has not made of one blood all the nations of the earth,[b] then how are our relations with these distinct races to differ from our relations to the lower animals? Have they souls? If not, may we not kill them as we kill the sheep and oxen? They may be good to eat, and there can, upon the supposition, be nothing wrong in eating them. If these uncivilized races are a distinct race of beings from ourselves, the idea of marriage unions

[a] St. Cypr., *Ad Donat., sub init.*, freely rendered.

[b] Acts xvii. 26.

with them is horrible. We need a new code to regulate our dealings with them, unless we may treat them as animals forthwith. If they are a totally distinct race of beings, what a folly was that splendid effort of Clarkson and Wilberforce, which shed such lustre on the earlier years of this century, when they vindicated the freedom of our slaves on the ground that slaves are men! They might just as well have advocated the emancipation of horses and of cows; if the Africans are indeed different creatures from ourselves, in such a sense as to be irreceptive of the highest truth that we have to teach them. Much more might be said about the bearings of this modern theory on St. Paul's teaching respecting the Second Adam;[a] the Second Adam in Whom all may be restored implies a first Adam in whom all fell from God by sin,—a first Adam who forsooth had no real existence, if the various races of men have no common human parent at all. No doubt great writers since Pritchard have repelled this attack upon the highest moral interests of humanity solely in the name and on the grounds of physical science. But let us observe that for us Christians this question is vital. Nothing less is at stake than whether we are yet to believe in the Office of the Incarnate Christ, in the destiny and hopes of humanity. But, at least, remark that the effort of the missionary cannot thus be treated as vain excepting on grounds which destroy the whole existing basis of morality between men, and which, if they be logically followed out, will carry us back altogether to the law of the strongest, to a reign of barbarism under which human rights will expire in a process of "natural selection" and the "survival of the fittest."

If, then, next Friday is to be a day of real prayer, we must remember that missionaries are a product of the

[a] Rom. v. 12–19.

missionary spirit; of an enthusiasm spread throughout the Church for the honour, the Name, the Kingdom of Christ. Let us pray that this enthusiasm be deepened and extended. Let us pray that we, too, though we stay at home, may sincerely share it. Let us pray against the causes, moral and intellectual, which impair its strength, in ourselves or in others—our feeble faith, our want of unity. God, of course, knows what the causes are much better than we do. He will remedy them by a fresh gift of Pentecostal fire, if He does not determine to afflict us as a Church with spiritual barrenness. But if we are to pray in earnest, we must act as if we meant to pray in earnest. We must take interest in the work which engages our prayers. We must make sacrifices for it. We must give time, thought, money, to those who are extending Christ's Kingdom, if we cannot go out in person and help to extend it. We must put our desires and enthusiasms into commission. The best way of doing this, as it appears to me, is for each person to interest himself in a particular Colonial Diocese; to learn and read all that can be read and learnt about it; to get into communication, if possible, with the Bishop, or Clergy, or active laity; and thus to sympathize with the hopes and fears, the failures and successes, of those who in this particular spot are doing what they can for our Lord's glory and for the souls of men. This will be a stimulus to collect money, books, and other things that may be wanted, and to do what can be done to encourage any of our acquaintances into whose hearts the Holy Spirit may have breathed the noble aspiration to become a missionary. An interest in Missions, as distinct from subscriptions to missionary societies, is of the greatest moment to the success of this work; enthusiasm for a mere organization which presents itself in the shape of meetings, a committee, a secretary,

a balance-sheet, is well-nigh impossible. Organization however perfect, is not the living flame which alone is light, and heat, and force. It is in human souls struggling towards the Truth, in human souls struggling, at the cost of health and life, to communicate that Truth, that the real interest of Missions must be sought and found; and when this is more generally the case around us, the work of our missionary societies themselves will be better appreciated, as enabling us to maintain and give expression to this essential part of our Christian duty.

Above all, let it not be thought that in praying or working for Foreign Missions a man is neglecting either the cause of the Church at home or the interests of his own soul. Every earnest effort has an invigorating effect far beyond that of its immediate object. "He that watereth shall be watered also himself."[a] Churches are generally living Churches in the ratio of their missionary activity. And as individuals, we cannot engage in the devotions of the proposed Day of Intercession with any tolerable degree of sincerity without wishing to be, without ourselves becoming, better men, more Christian, more earnest and consistent in our Christianity. No law is more certain in the spiritual world than that to give is to receive more abundantly than we give. Self-sacrifice for others, in the Name of Him Who died for us all, inevitably carries with it the most precious and lasting blessings for ourselves. If we have any real hand in handing on the fire which Christ came to kindle in human hearts, depend upon it that sacred flame will warm and lighten us proportionately.

[a] Prov. xi. 25.

SERMON VII.

THE SONG OF THE NEW KINGDOM.

(FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT.)

ISA. XXV. 9.

And it shall be said in that day: Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him: and He will save us.

IT would have been natural, my brethren, to have considered this passage last Sunday,[a] when it occurred in the Proper Lesson. But such words have a meaning which is especially welcome to Christians throughout the season of Advent. They occur in one of the finest poems even of Isaiah. At the conclusion of a cycle of prophecies relating to the heathen,[b] the prophet enters[c] on the description of a catastrophe that will enwrap the world. The particular judgments predicted in the earlier prophecies against the several Gentile nations flow as into a sea into this universal judgment.[d] The scattered hints of a coming salvation which are found in most of those earlier utterances are here concentrated into a focus; they shine forth in a blaze of noonday splendour. The twenty-fourth and three following chapters thus stand

[a] Third Sunday in Advent. [b] Isa. xiii.–xxiii.

[c] In chap. xxiv. See Delitzsch's introductory remarks.

[d] Delitzsch, *in loc.*

towards the preceding ten in the relation of a *finale* to an elaborate piece of music. In this supreme effort all the moods and surprises of the composition are gathered up into a splendid outburst of harmony, combining and flinging forth, as if in a spirit of careless, boisterous profusion, yet ever with an unerring measure of severe exactness, all that is most solemn, all that is most tender, all that is most majestic, all that is most thrilling, in what has gone before. The prophet offers us a picture of judgment, in which all is completed by a few rapid, vigorous, comprehensive, awful clauses. The world's pleasures are judged; the world's city is judged; the judgment falls upon the princes of Heaven and upon the princes of the earth. The judgment is compared to a repetition of the flood, implying its universality; it is described as an earthquake, implying its sudden and paralyzing terror; it furnishes the outline which is filled up by St. John in the later visions of the Apocalypse. The terrific description ends at last; and as it passes away into the distance, like a retiring storm-cloud, it is succeeded by four melodious odes;[a] odes in which, after Isaiah's manner, the very language is melody; a melody of words winning sympathy for the ideas even before they have presented themselves to the mind; a melody of words almost making itself felt through the dense medium of a translation.

It is in the second of these odes that we find the words of the text. "They shall say in that day." What is meant by "that day"? If we could be certain that the preceding description of the judgment refers only to the Great Day of Account, then "that day" in the ode which follows would be the Eternal Morning breaking beyond. But this judgment upon the earth

[a] Chapters xxv.–xxvii. 6.

in Isaiah cannot be exclusively identified with the Last Judgment as revealed by our Lord. Isaiah would seem to be thinking of that constant judgment of men and nations which is ever proceeding in the Divine Mind, and of which the Great Day of Account will be the highest and last expression. If this be so, the odes which follow may have a present as well as a future reference. And in truth, when we take them to pieces, they seem sometimes to belong to the new Kingdom of Messiah on earth, sometimes to an unearthly Realm beyond. From the prophet's point of observation the two melt into one; the Kingdom of Christ on earth and the Kingdom of Christ in Heaven being, as they are, one in the deepest reality. But this song of the New Kingdom, speaking as it does of a salvation which is not yet completed, belongs more properly to the Church or Kingdom of Christ on earth.

> "And they say in that day,
> Lo, this is our God;
> We have waited for Him:
> He will save us.
> This is the Lord,
> For Whom we waited;
> We will be glad and rejoice in His salvation." [a]

Remark that these words follow a description of world-wide blessings; of a great Eucharistic feast of all the nations celebrated on Mount Zion, the seat of the Divine Presence, the hallowed centre of worship.

> "And in this mountain shall the Lord of Hosts
> Prepare for all the peoples
> A feast of fat things;
> A feast of wine on the lees,
> Of fat things rich in marrow,
> Of wines on the lees thoroughly strained." [b]

[a] Isa. xxv. 9. [b] *Ib.* 6.

Although this Universal Feast is on earth, it is on an earth which to the prophet's eye seems to be already Heaven; just as St. Paul says that Christians have been made to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus,[a] and that they exercise civic functions as citizens of Heaven:[b] for the barrier between God and the world has been broken down;[c] death is practically no more; and human tears have been wiped away. The prophet proceeds—

> "The Lord casts away upon this mountain
> The veil that veiled over all the peoples,
> And the covering that covered all the nations.
> He makes death disappear for ever;
> From every face the Lord Jehovah wipes the tear;
> He removes the shame of His people from the whole earth:
> For the Lord hath spoken it."[d]

Here, it might seem, is already the New Jerusalem. All suffering whose ultimate ground is sin has been removed; all tears have been dried up by the Great Consoler; the earth is a dwelling-place for the blessed. The very words of the description are borrowed to be paraphrased by St. Paul, when he tells the Corinthians of the triumph of the Resurrection over death;[e] they reappear in St. John, in those last pages of the Revelation, to which we all of us turn when we try to think steadily about the eternal future.[f] And yet the Church on earth is in idea what the Church in Heaven is in fact; they are not so much two different states, as one and the same state at two different stages of development. The prophet then is listening to the voice of Christendom;[g] he writes as if the words were falling on his ear.

[a] Eph. ii. 6. [b] *Ib.* 19. [c] *Ib.* 14.
[d] Isa. xxv. 7, 8. [e] 1 Cor. xv. 54. [f] Rev. xxi. 4; xxii.
[g] See Delitzsch, *in loc.*, on וְאָמַר. The undefined but self-evident subject to this verb is the Church of the last days.

"They say in that day,
Lo, this is our God;
We have waited for Him:
He will save us.
This is the Lord;
We have waited for Him,
We will be glad and rejoice in His salvation."

Nor is what follows as to the judgment upon Moab inconsistent with this. Moab is not here the historical Moab; the fierce race which dwelt on the eastern shores of the Dead Sea. In Isaiah, Moab, like Babylon, is constantly a mystical name for the world hostile to God's people, and unreconciled to God. But as Babylon represents the oppressive power of the world, so Moab represents the world's chronic scorn and contemptuousness. Babylon enslaves; Moab only mocks. Moab is the aggregate of all the sneers, all the cynicism, all the proud sayings and bitter invectives, of which the Kingdom of God and His cause have been the object from Egypt to Babylon, from Edom at the Captivity to Ammon at the Restoration, from the Jews at the Crucifixion to the Athenians around St. Paul, from Celsus and Libanius and Julian to Gibbon and Voltaire and Strauss. When, therefore, God is revealed on Mount Zion, a characteristic humiliation awaits this company of scorners.

"The Hand of the Lord will sink down upon this mountain,
And Moab is trodden down there where he is,
Trodden as straw is trodden in the water of the dung-pit.
Moab spreadeth out his hands in the pool therein,
As the swimmer spreadeth out his hands to swim;
But the Lord forceth down the pride of Moab,
Despite the skilled efforts of his hands." [a]

The word which here stands for "dung-pit" is almost exactly the same word as "Madmën," the name of a Moabite town; and the degradation of the proud race, vainly

[a] Isa. xxv. 10-12.

endeavouring to struggle against the overwhelming humiliation to which by the Justice of God it is condemned, in history, is depicted in a vivid image which needs no comment. The confusion of pagan thinkers at the triumph of the Church under Constantine, the confusion of modern sceptics at the Christian reaction which followed the great French Revolution throughout Europe, the confusion which awaits all who oppose Him when Christ comes at last to Judgment, are traced by anticipation. "He hath put down the mighty from their seat, and hath exalted the humble and meek; He hath filled the hungry with good things, but the rich He hath sent empty away,"[a] is the echo of history.

It is the great ceaseless song of Christendom; rejoicing beneath the Throne of Christ; congratulating Him on His triumphs, on His glorious Presence and Power; looking back to the ages which preceded His Advent; looking forward to the completeness of His salvation yet to come; it is this hymn of victory that Isaiah hears. Let us try to understand, ever so little, the inspired words in which we ought to be joining, and which so nearly concern us.

I.

The song begins with a discovery. "Lo! this is our God." Not "God" simply, but "our God;" just as Christ is not merely "the Lord" as in St. Luke, who would do Him especial honour by the phrase, but the more affectionate "our Lord" as so often elsewhere in the New Testament. "Our God." Then He belongs to us; we have a share in Him; He will befriend us. "This God is our God for ever and ever: He will be our Guide unto death."[b] "Our God:" He has told us what to expect in

[a] St. Luke i. 52, 53. [b] Ps. xlviii. 13.

Him; how to know Him when He comes; how to claim our part in Him. "Our God." Both Jews and Gentiles, although in different senses, may speak of Him thus; may see in Him that which makes Him the Treasure of the whole human family and of every part of it.

"This is our God." A devout Jew on his conversion felt that he had found the warrant and verification of the religion of his ancestors in finding Christ. The religion of Moses had been a schoolmaster to bring him unto Christ.[a] It had created profound moral wants; a sense of sin, a yearning for holiness, for pardon, for peace, which it could not itself satisfy. It had displayed before his eyes an elaborate ritual, which on the very face of it was a symbol of something beyond itself; which, as the Apostle pointed out to the Hebrews, bore on it the stamp of suggestive incompleteness.[b] Finally, it brought before him a long line of prophecies about a coming Deliverer, increasing in definiteness, increasing in magnificence, as the ages passed, till every particular—the date,[c] the tribe,[d] the birth,[e] the death,[f] the triumph[g] of the Promised One—had been sketched out beforehand. When, then, Christ came, He came as the Living Counterpart of an ideal which, however it might have been perverted, at particular epochs or by particular classes, already existed in the mind of the Jewish people. It was natural for a Jew to exclaim, "Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him: He will save us." When He came, the true Israel recognized Him as the Heir of the promises. "Mine eyes," cried the aged Simeon, "have seen Thy salvation!"[h] "The Day-star from on high hath visited us!"[i] exclaimed the Priest Zacharias. "We have found

[a] Gal. iii. 24. [b] Heb. ix. [c] Dan. ix. 24–27.
[d] Gen. xlix. 10. [e] Isa. vii. 14. [f] *Ib.* liii.
[g] Ps. xvi. 10; xxiv. 7–10. [h] St. Luke ii. 30. [i] *Ib.* i. 78.

the Messias!"[a] so, with deep joy and awe, St. Andrew tells St. Peter. "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God,"[b] is St. Peter's own confession. "We have heard Him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world,"[c] was the confession of the Samaritans. "My Lord and my God!"[d] after his brief agony of doubt, was the passionate ejaculation of St. Thomas. "The Law was a schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ;"[e] "Christ is the End of the Law for righteousness to every one that believeth,"[f] is the calm retrospective judgment of St. Paul.

The Jews were not the only people who were prepared for the appearance of Christ. God spoke—not so clearly, yet truly—through nature to the conscience of the Gentile world. Great heathen writers attempted to draw a picture or ideal of moral goodness. It always failed, in one or more particulars; sometimes it failed very grossly. But the repeated effort trained the natural conscience of heathendom; gave it a limited power of discerning moral beauty, and of seeing by glimpses something of the evil of sin, and of the moral necessity for its punishment. Thus, while the Christian teachers of the Churches of Judæa insisted that Jesus corresponded to the Christ of prophecy, the Christian teachers in the Church of Alexandria, living and working amid a population of cultivated and scholarly pagans, pointed out how He corresponded to all that was highest, purest, truest, best, in the old heathen philosophies. They pointed out how all the fragments of truth which were scattered in various heathen systems met in Christ, without the error which was always associated with them elsewhere; how all the momentary intuitions into higher truth, all the fleeting

[a] St. John i. 41. [b] *Ib.* vi. 69. [c] *Ib.* iv. 42.
[d] *Ib.* xx. 28. [e] Gal. iii. 24. [f] Rom. x. 4.

visions of a purer Beauty, all the ecstasies which had visited lofty souls—for a moment only, to plunge them in a deeper desolation—were indeed realized and made permanent in Christ. The conscience of the best pagan philosophy could say, "Lo, this is our God"—this is the Ideal we have been seeking for, this is He of Whom we have caught fitful glimpses, yet Who ever has eluded us till now—"we have waited for Him: He will save us."

Certainly it was true that the heathen philosophies taught as much falsehood as truth, often more. Tertullian, speaking of his own experience, said that the voice of Nature—its truest, deepest utterance within the soul—was really silenced in the schools of the teachers of human wisdom. He used an expression which has become famous, when he appealed to the "witness of that soul of man which is by nature Christian"—"O testimonium animæ naturaliter Christianæ!"[a] By this he did not mean that man in his fallen state could return to God without God's grace, or that the twilight of natural light was the same thing as the sunlight of revelation. He meant, as did St. Paul, that God spoke, as if in an undertone, to man's natural conscience; and that the echoes of His Voice could be traced in the simple unguarded expressions of uneducated men. The heathen around him said, "God bless thee," "God will recompense," "God will judge," "The good God," "If God will," and the like. They did not think of the full meaning of the words, which implied the Providence, the Justice, the Tenderness, of God. Tertullian tried to make them think; he insisted that they were involuntarily uttering truth which God had taught them within. "I summon thee," he passionately exclaims, "O soul of man, not as thou art when, trained in the schools, familiar with the libraries, nourished in

[a] *Apol.*, c. 17.

the academies and porches of Athens, thou utterest thy crude wisdom. I address thee, in thy simple and rude estate, unpolished and unlettered, such as thou art in those who have nought but thee; such as thou art in the thoroughfare, in the highway, in the weaver's factory. I have need of thy inexperience; since in thy experience no faith whatever can be placed. Give me those truths which thou bringest along with thy very self; truths which thou hast learnt to know either from thyself, or from the Author of thy being."[a]

Such appeals as these were not without results. The elementary ideas of God, goodness, evil, retribution, however shadowy, pointed forward. Would a living embodiment of goodness ever come? Would a deliverer from the power and guilt of sin ever present himself? Would God ever draw nearer, and own this conscience which He had made? The Gentile world, educated and uneducated, says St. Paul was "feeling after God, if haply it might find Him, though He be not far from every one of us."[b]

Take such a case as Justin Martyr, who lived in the first half of the second century. He tells us that he sought repose for his soul in many philosophical systems, and last of all in the Platonic philosophy, which greatly attracted him.[c] But after he had been converted to Christ, and had given up the profession of all heathen wisdom, he writes: "In Christianity I first found the only certain and healthy philosophy. Gladly, if I could, would I impart to all else the same disposition which I now possess, not to forsake the instructions of the Saviour; for these instructions have in them a power to

[a] Tertullian, *De Testimonio Animæ*, c. 1. The two last sentences are in a different order from that of Oehler's text.

[b] Acts xvii. 27.

[c] St. Justin Martyr, *Dial. Tryph.*, § 2.

shame those who have wandered from the right way, while they furnish the most delightful refreshment to those who obey them."[a] So, in the thankfulness of his heart, and speaking from his own experience, he calls Christ the glorious Rock, from which living water flows into the hearts of all those who, through Him, love the Father of all;[b] and he speaks of Him as the Word of Truth and Wisdom, burning and shining brighter than the sun, penetrating by His Rays into the depths of the heart and soul.[c] What is all this but Justin's echo of the song, "Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him"? So, again, it was with St. Augustine. His *Confessions* form the first and the greatest of Christian autobiographies. A clever young man, he spent his youth, partly in exploring the false systems which borrowed a little truth from Christianity and a great deal of error from the wild speculations or traditions of the East, and partly in sensual indulgence. He tells us how he rebelled against the tyranny of sinful habit; but in vain.[d] He tells us how he doubted the plausible sophistries which were enchaining his understanding in its efforts to mount to God;[e] and how at last the decisive moment came, and he was free.[f] And then what follows is a long hymn of praise; one continuous thanksgiving for his having found rest and peace in finding Christ in His Church, and in escaping from the enemies of his salvation. He is never weary of recurring to the subject; he has never exhausted it: it never presents itself under exactly the same aspect; it is always fresh in form, yet in substance always the same. "Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him: He will come and save us."

[a] *Dial. Tryph.*, § 8. [b] *Ib.*, § 114. [c] *Ib.*, § 121.
[d] *Conf.*, Bk. viii. [v.] § 10–12. [e] *Ib.*, Bk. v. [xi.] § 20–25.
[f] *Ib.*, Bk. viii. [xii.] § 28–30.

"Lo, this is our God!" My brethren, if the Christian sense is still alive within us, our hearts, too, must sometimes bound with joy in the consciousness of our possessing Christ. Much of our Christian worship is an expression of this joy. It has no meaning, accordingly, for those who do not share the feeling which it expresses. "What is the good of going to church, day after day, to sing together a number of Psalms and Canticles, which you have sung for years; which do not profess to ask for anything, like prayers; which do not add anything to your information, like sermons or lectures; which seem to be only the indulgence of a taste, a fancy, a sentiment? *Cui bono?* What is the good of it?"[a] So men speak. They might as well ask a pure and warm-hearted child why it throws its arms around its mother's neck, and assures her that it loves her better than any one else in the world. If, indeed, our Christ be only a fable, handed down to us from another age, but not really entitled to challenge the homage of a practical generation, the taunting question is reasonable enough. But if He be, as we know and are sure, "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever;"[b] as truly ours, though we see Him not, as He was the possession of His first disciples;—then our love and devotion to Him is proof against the brutal utilitarianism which would silence the song of Christendom from age to age. "Lo, this is our God!" That song—thanking Him for being ours, congratulating ourselves that He is ours—is the simple air of which Jewish Psalms, read by Christian eyes, and Gospel Canticles, and Hymns, whether Ancient or Modern, are the continuous variations; that song is the unceasing protestation of the heart of Christendom, bowed before the Cradle, the Cross, the Throne,

[a] These words were once used to the preacher in conversation.

[b] Heb. xiii. 8.

of Christ, that He is as good as His Word, that in Him the soul of man finds its all.

II.

"We have waited for Him." Here is the necessary, the precious discipline, by which souls, communities, reach Truth. Truth is not given all at once, to the impatient, to the self-willed, to those who would make conditions with the Giver, and bid Him hasten His work. God's ancient people lived and died "in faith," says the Apostle; "not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them."[a] This is the history of centuries. As the years passed, the great promises made to Abraham became clearer and clearer; left less to the imagination, less to popular hopes or fears, as they closed around the Person, the Birth, the Life, the Death, the Work, the Triumph, of their great Object. Yet men had to wait: from Abraham to Moses, from Moses to David, from David to Isaiah, from Isaiah to Malachi, from Malachi to the Baptist. The fulfilment was continuously postponed, as it seemed; postponed, that men might wait without losing heart, without losing patience, without losing interest. "The vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry."[b] Such were the precepts, such the consolations, of prophecy; and at last He, so long anticipated, came; and there was an outburst of joy from thankful hearts. "Lo, this is our God," they said; "we have waited for Him." Observe how the great Evangelical Hymns, at the beginning of St. Luke's Gospel, dwell on

[a] Heb. xi. 13. [b] Hab. ii. 3.

this immense past, which at last was ended. "He remembering His mercy," sings the Blessed Virgin Mother, "hath holpen His servant Israel; as He promised to our forefathers, Abraham and His seed, for ever."[a] "The Lord God of Israel," cries Zacharias, "hath raised up a mighty salvation for us in the house of His servant David; as He spake by the mouth of His holy Prophets, which have been since the world began."[b] "Now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace," exclaims the aged Simeon, "according to Thy Word: for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation."[c]

There is a solemn question which forces itself at times upon the mind: Why is it that one man believes, and another, with apparently the same advantages and disadvantages, disbelieves the teaching of the Gospel? No doubt the true answer to this question cannot be, in any instance, a simple one. Nothing leads to more serious fallacies, in inquiries of all kinds, than the idea that a given effect can have only one cause. But, bearing this in mind, and without entering on other explanations which may be reasonably urged, let one explanation be considered. Many a man comes short of faith through sheer impatience. He cannot stand the discipline of waiting, seeking, hoping, without being satisfied. Perhaps he is haunted by the dark phantom of Atheism. He cannot reconcile the supervision of an All-powerful and Benevolent Being with the prevalence of pain and suffering in the natural world.

> "He trusted God was Love indeed,
> And Love creation's final law;—
> But Nature, red in tooth and claw
> With ravine, shrieked against the creed."

He has not patience to wait; to follow out, in its moral, remedial, judicial aspects, and others besides, the astonish-

[a] St. Luke i. 54, 55. [b] *Ib.* 69, 70. [c] *Ib.* ii. 29, 30.

ing phenomenon of pain. Yet in such a question patience is everything. Everything may depend on the power of suspending judgment in presence of a difficult and intricate inquiry. Or he is a Deist, who talks cynically of Christianity, as involving a series of supernatural impossibilities. Let him wait. If he really believes in a moral and loving God,—let him consider if his Theism can really hold its ground against the Atheism which he dreads, without some such explanation of the great problems of sin and pain as Christianity affords. Or he is a Christian; yet perplexed by popular objections to the historical worth or moral character of certain parts of Holy Scripture. Again, I say, let him wait; to deal thoroughly with the historical questions in the Book of Genesis or the moral questions in the Book of Joshua requires time, work, patience. Or he has difficulties about reconciling the Atonement with the Justice of God, or the doctrines of Sacramental grace with the spirituality of the Gospel. Here, too, he will not see his way all at once through an intricate moral and theological inquiry; probably he will never see it, if he is impatient. Or he echoes at second hand the vulgar objections to the Athanasian Creed. The Creed is absurd and indefensible, he says; he does not care to go into it. If he would only wait, he would understand that the recognition of truth, whether in nature or in thought, is, as a rule, the reward of perseverance; and is denied, as a rule, to the irritable presumption that will not wait. All the more serious objections which have been urged against this Creed pierce the vitals of the Faith itself; and unless we are prepared to say that man's belief in God, as He has revealed Himself, has nothing to do with man's eternal well-being, we must wish to keep the Creed where and as it is. But, undoubtedly, the subject is an intricate one,

and takes time. Let him wait. The mountain of Truth, if climbed at all, must be climbed by the virtues of patience and humility, one on either side of perseverance. Nothing can be hoped from the off-hand, peremptory spirit, which takes up a popular objection as if it embodied the wisdom of an entire philosophy, and at once disposed of some truth against which it is directed; the spirit which says, "If I cannot see my way through this or that difficulty, and in such or such a time, I give up the whole matter." Truth is at once too subtle and too majestic to be dealt with in this way; and they who thus deal with her miss her altogether. The exulting chant, "Lo, this is our God," is permitted to those who can add, "We have waited for Him."

III.

"He will save us." This conviction is the climax of the Christian's joy. It is not "He will come and instruct us." Christ is not merely a Great Instructor of His own and succeeding generations. He is that; He does save from ignorance; but He does much more. "Thou shalt call His Name Jesus: for He shall save His people from their sins."[a] This is His great, His unique triumph in human history. Others have brought new ideas, new conceptions of life and destiny, new and magnificent impulses to thought. The Saviour of Christendom laid His Hand to the root of human misery—moral evil. And from it and its consequences "He is able to save to the uttermost those who come unto God by Him."[b] He brought as a remedy; not indeed a mechanical, but a moral, salvation. He took on Him the nature which had offended, which was steeped in degradation and guilt; and in that nature He offered to the Sanctity and Justice

[a] St. Matt. i. 21. [b] Heb. vii. 25.

of God a Life of unsullied obedience, leading up to a Death of agony and shame, which His Divine Person invested with a priceless value. We may make His Life and Death our own, if we will. United with Him, we claim His Righteousness as our own; "we are accepted in the Beloved."[a] "If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous: and He is the Propitiation for our sins."[b] And we all need Him: for "if we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His Word is not in us;"[c] while yet "the Blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, cleanseth us from all sin."[d] This unspeakable blessing does not depend upon a transfer of the merits of Christ to the credit of Christians, so arbitrary that no moral account of it can be given, but upon the fact that Christians in a state of grace are so united to Christ by faith and love on their part, and by the power of the Eternal Spirit and the efficacy of the Sacraments on His, that they constitute, together with Him, in the sight of God a single moral person. They are as truly blessed and invigorated by the perfect Sanctity and Atoning Power of the Second Adam, as the whole race was compromised through the error of the First.

"He will save us." The salvation is indeed begun; it is not completed here. "It doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is."[e] While we are still here, we may fail: He will come to insure us against failure. While we are still here, we are surrounded by dangers: He will come to rescue us. "I go to prepare a place for you," He said; "but I will come again, and receive you unto Myself, that where I am ye may be also."[f]

[a] Eph. i. 6. [b] 1 St. John ii. 1, 2. [c] *Ib.* i. 10.
[d] *Ib.* 7. [e] *Ib.* iii. 2. [f] St. John xiv. 2, 3.

"He will save us." One of the most searching questions that a man can put to himself, if he would discover his real spiritual condition, is this: How does he look forward to death? With indifference? That can hardly be, if he ever really thinks. A man can know but little of the mysterious being which he carries about within him, which is himself, if he has not a certainty, prior to speculation and confirmed by it, that this self will not perish at death, but will live on. What will become of it? Does he, then, look forward to death with secret terror, which he would not avow except to a very close friend, but from which he cannot escape? This, too, is natural enough if, believing in his immortality and conscious of his sin, he feels the years slipping away, and has had more than one warning that his bodily frame is breaking up. But it need not be. "There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."[a] There are thousands of Christians who look forward to death as, indeed, the gate of life. Not, indeed, we may be sure, without some measure of awe; awe at entering on an untried sphere of being; awe at beginning to exist under altogether new conditions; awe at seeing, for the first time, God, souls, the universe, as they are seen in that other world. But certainly without terror, because terror is cast out by love;[b] the soul cannot shrink in dread from the nearer sight of Him Whom it desires. It was my privilege to witness a death-bed in which this triumph of faith over death was conspicuously manifested. Relations and friends were standing round; it was evident that all must soon be over; and some of those present could not control their grief. The dying person summoned up strength to speak: "I cannot think why you should be

[a] Rom. viii. 1. [b] 1 St. John iv. 18.

distressing yourselves as you do; if it were not for leaving you all for a short time, I should not have a single regret at what is going to happen. For between thirty and forty years, every morning and evening I have been preparing for this solemn moment, and it has come at last. O Lord, I thank Thee that it has come." What was this but an echo of the song, "Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him: He will come and save us"? Nor will it be otherwise with those who are in a state of grace, and alive upon the earth, when Christ comes to Judgment. That awful, unimaginable moment, —when the knell of human history, of human civilization, of human thought, of all that makes up human life, at last shall sound, and when "men shall see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory,"—will be saluted by the Redeemed, as they gaze upwards, with an outburst of thankful joy. "Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him: He will save us."

Christmas is almost here, and those of you who are living Christian lives must decide what to pray for at your Christmas Communion. It is unwise to leave prayers at Communion to the impulse of the moment; they ought to be arranged beforehand. Considering their great power for raising and strengthening us, they are exceedingly precious. Pray, then, that from this Christmas onwards you may be able to say, at the Cradle, at the Cross, at the Grave, and before the Heavenly Throne of Jesus, "Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him: He will indeed save us." Pray that when you are alone you may say these words, one after another, with the utmost deliberation, throwing into them all the clearness that your understanding can command, all the warmth of your affections, all the power and intensity of your will. In short, pray that you may mean them. If you

do, they will bless you; now, at this Blessed Festival of the Divine Redeemer's Birth, and hereafter.

And you who as yet have not found your way to God's Altar, do not lose heart, as if you could never have part in the secret blessings of the New Kingdom. Certainly you have yet to know, by experience, that no moments in existence can compare, for purity and intensity of happiness, with those during which a Christian soul, here on earth, unites itself to Christ in the Sacrament of His Love. But do not lose heart. Make the most of the truth which you already know, and it will lead you on; do not rest till, by God's grace, you have made the most of it. Only let no root of bitterness[a] stand before you and your eternal birthright; only let no cherished evil keep you from your God. A day will come to you too, if you will, when you shall say, with a sincerity you little imagine now, "Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him: He will save us."

[a] Heb. xii. 15.

SERMON VIII.

THE GLORY OF THE GOSPEL.

(SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT.)

1 TIM. I. 11.

The glorious Gospel of the Blessed God.

WHAT,—men often ask,—what is a phrase? Well, it may be nothing more than an ornament of human speech, intended to embellish some subject which would be prosaic or dull without it. Now, a phrase, in this sense of the term, is not entitled to any great respect. It is like an ornament in architecture which means nothing; which adds nothing to the strength or purpose of a building. It recalls the tinsel garniture with which bad wares are sometimes recommended to careless purchasers. A phrase thus comes to mean in many minds something that is without basis in fact; something unsubstantial, flimsy, deceptive.

But a phrase need not mean this; and, considering the use and dignity of human language as the expression of thought, it ought never to mean it. In a sincere man a phrase means a great deal; it expresses a thought or feeling which would not be expressed if he did not use it. In every really great writer, that is, in every writer who, by moral weight or mental power, has come to reign

during a course of years, perhaps of centuries, over the reason and heart and imagination of men, his phrases almost rank with his arguments. They condense, and they set forth by the condensation, whatever is most characteristic and imperious in the writer's mind; they mark the moments when speech is most vivid with the force and fire of the thought which bursts forth through it; they are not less significant when they are produced by impulse, whether of thought or feeling, provided only that they express it accurately. Men feel this; and therefore, from time to time in the world's history, a phrase becomes a power and may even play a great part. Those who dislike its import will protest; but the conquering phrase is believed to embody fact or reason, and it holds on its way. It passes from mouth to mouth; from writer to writer; even from one language to another: it achieves in a summary manner the work of a dozen arguments. It may propagate a saving truth; it may be the apostle of a capital error. But in any case it is a power; and all forms of belief and opinion are anxious to command its services if they can. So it is in political life, as we all know; so it is in the more sacred province of religion. From the days when the great and fruitful phrases, "the Kingdom of Heaven,"[a] "the Blood of the Lamb,"[b] "justification by faith in the Son of God,"[c] "the washing of regeneration,"[d] were first uttered in the distant East, down to our own day and country, Christianity has had to do with phrases; some of them short-lived and disappearing at once into history; some of them living on in documents of more or less authority, or in popular religious language, and so shaping the thoughts and feelings of men from one generation to another.

Now, in this expression of St. Paul's, "the glorious

[a] St. Matt. iii. 2. [b] Rev. vii. 14. [c] Rom. v. 1. [d] Tit. iii. 5.

Gospel of the Blessed God," we have one of those phrases which have moved the world. It sums up the impression which the Religion of Jesus Christ made upon the mind and the heart of the man, who, so far as we know, has done more for its extension than any other human being since the Incarnation. The glorious Gospel, or, as it might be rendered, "the Gospel of the glory of the Blessed God;" that group of words tells us what our religion was to the great Apostle. Let us try to take it to pieces. Let us ask ourselves why he, a man who knew what words meant, a man of reason rather than of impulse, a man whose whole life expressed the sincerity with which he uttered this very expression—let us ask ourselves why he called his Master's religion "the glorious Gospel of the Blessed God."

The answer to that question may be of service to us in two respects. First, it will give shape and strength to our thoughts in the Advent season; when we are considering the coming of the Son of God into this our world; its meaning for the world's history; its meaning for our own souls; its meaning as a preparation for and warrant of another coming of His, which is still future, and which will be of the utmost significance to every child of Adam. And, secondly, it may help us to turn the lessons of the Day of Intercession for Missions[a] to some practical account. Those persons whose occupations on that day did not allow them to take part in the public service of the Church must have felt, if they were good Christians, that it was a great day of Prayer; a day, not merely fertile, as we must trust, with blessings to the heathen, but full of meaning for the spiritual life of the Church of God in this country; a day likely to prove the turning-point in its destiny of many an immortal

[a] The previous Wednesday had been so observed.

soul. Before the grace and fervour of such a day as that has faded away, it is well to try to gather up some of the fragments that remain of it; to make sure, if God wills, that, so far as we are concerned, it shall not have been utterly wasted.

When St. Paul thus speaks of the Gospel, he meant at the least that it is a truth, offered to man in the Name and on the authority of God. It is the Gospel of the Blessed God. Man did not invent it; it was not the growth of human minds, although they have taught it. It came from God. Coming thus from the Source of Truth, it is simply true. St. Paul did not spend his best years, his strength, his health—he did not encounter fatigue, persecution, imprisonment, and lastly, death—for anything less than a Divine certainty. For him the Gospel was not a guess about the Unseen which might conceivably turn out to be untrue; nor yet an opinion about it which might be balanced or overset by a counter-opinion, resting upon equal probabilities. He believed with all his heart that God, Who had made Himself partially known through a long line of centuries to his own Hebrew ancestors, had spoken to men, fully and finally, in the Person of His Son.[a] For St. Paul Jesus Christ stood apart from all others; He was unlike any other in all the course of human history; He was unique alike in His Person and in His Work. The Religion of Jesus was for him the only true, or, as men now speak, the absolute Religion; and his one ambition was to make all men see what a blessed thing it is to be associated in its faith and practice. To St. Paul the central proof of this was the outward, independent, purely historical fact of Christ's Resurrection from the dead; a fact which was attested by some hundreds of people who had seen

[a] Heb. i. 1, 2.

the Risen Saviour.[a] But, besides this, there were many inward proofs that this Religion met the deepest needs of his being, and so showed, by the strong yet tender hand which it could lay on the human soul, that it proceeded from the Heart of the God Who made us.

On no other understanding than this are Christian Missions to the heathen a reasonable or even a defensible enterprise. If Christianity were only a guess at truth, more successful in our opinion than other guesses about it, but still a guess; then, I say, to try to convert heathen nations to it would be not merely a waste of time, it would be a gross impertinence. What right have those who confess that they only *guess* to address themselves to men who believe, however mistakenly, that they *know?* What would an educated Mahomedan or Buddhist say, to a missionary who asked him to give up his old faith on such a ground as this? He would say, "Really, sir, you mistake both my wants and your own capacities. I want something certain to lean upon, if I am to practise any religion at all; and if my old creed is partly or altogether false, it at least does or can do more for me than your hesitating supposition. If you would have me change my mind, you must be certain about your own; you must give me something that will not be less positive than the faith which you would take away."

The Gospel of God is a certainty for those who believe it, on His Word; but what are the features in it which constitute what St. Paul calls its "glory"?

I.

The Gospel is glorious, first, because it reveals and proclaims the true glory of God's Being. By His true

[a] 1 Cor. xv. 6.

glory, I mean the glory of His character, of His attributes, as a Moral God. St. Paul calls it a revelation; and what is a revelation but the removal of a veil which had hidden God from the soul of man?

We may make pretty sure of the existence of a God without a revelation; His Eternal Power and Godhead are understood from the things that are made,[a] and that meet the eyes of men. There is an idea of a Supreme Being discoverable in all human minds, but in varying degrees of distinctness; as is the idea of right and wrong; as is the idea of the square or the circle. And as man sets out with an idea of this kind, which he can cherish or neglect, which he can cross-question and develop, or shut out and crush, he looks out on the world around him. "This Universe," he says to himself, "this earth on which I tread, that heaven above me, these creatures around me, nay, I myself, not the least remarkable object among all that I can observe, must owe the debt of existence to some Being; and He must be higher, greater, more powerful, more intelligent than any other." Man cannot refuse to recognize the law which makes him reason like this; the law of cause and effect. He sees that it governs objects and events without him; he finds that it shapes his thoughts, hour by hour, within. If all around him has a cause, and if that cause must be greater than any of the effects which are traceable to it, then the First Cause must be a Person, possessing consciousness, memory, and will; if only because we ourselves are persons, to say nothing of other created beings. And, as a Person, He must have a very awful and magnificent Mind, and a Will of incalculable power; in order to have produced such a Universe as this.

Thus man may reason, when left to himself, and mak-

[a] Rom. i. 20.

ing the best of the means with which God has endowed him. But when he has done the best with his reason, how far has it led him? It has left him at the feet of an awful Being, Whose Thought and Whose Arm can reach further than anything else he can conceive. Of such a Being, when he thinks steadily, he must think with apprehension or with terror. Hence the heathen misconceptions of God; attributing to Him all that is fierce and mean in our fallen nature, and in the end denying His Unity, and substituting for Him various debased embodiments of the passions or vices of His creatures.

Now and then, indeed, Reason has tried to go further. She has fixed her eye upon the law of right and wrong within the soul, and has asked the question, Who gave man that law? We Christians know how that question must be answered; and this makes it very difficult for us to put ourselves in the place of those who had never heard the answer, which is a certainty to us. It must have been a good being who gave such a law as that; but is the giver the same being as the Lord of Nature, as the Maker of men? There is much in the natural world to make an answer to that question difficult, if man is left to his own resources. The animal creation, as well as human society, is full of dark shadows, which may well overcloud man's unassisted thought. The existence of pain, the distribution of pain, the existence of worse things than any pain can be, are matters of fact. They weigh down the thoughts of men. They account for the hesitating, timid steps; for the failure, in all practical senses, of the best efforts of the old philosophy. He Who made this Universe must be a vast, awful Intelligence. He must have resources at His command which our thought in vain endeavours to grasp. But can we trust, can we love,

can we long for Him? Is He also Just, Faithful, Merciful, Holy? That was the question.

That question it is the glory of the Gospel to have answered. It has bridged over the chasm between the physical and the moral world; between the Author of the Laws of Nature and the Inward Lawgiver, Who speaks to Conscience. For the Gospel is the history of One in Whom no sharp-sighted malice could detect the taint of sin; Who at once appealed to the consciences of men as being Himself all that they had conceived of as best; Who could say, "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father."[a] How could it be shown that this perfect Being was none other than the Maker and Ruler of the world? I answer, by miracle; that is, by a striking innovation upon nature, appealing, as did our Lord's Resurrection, at a critical moment to the sympathies of conscience. Paley was right enough when he said in the old way, that miracle is the credential of a Teacher Who claims to come from God. But miracle has another purpose; it establishes the oneness of the Lord of Nature with the Lord of Conscience. It is the countersign of the Unseen written on the very face of what we see, by Him Who is the Lord both of the seen and the Unseen; and thus it establishes, by a test which man can understand, the moral character—the Justice, the Truth, the Tenderness, of the Almighty Maker and Master of the Universe.

Ah! if the Gospel has lodged this conviction in the minds of millions of men, we may surely term it glorious. It is glorious to have driven the clouds from the face of Heaven. It is glorious to have banished the spectres of heathendom; to have displayed to the sight of men a Being Who is not only Powerful and Wise, but strictly Just; not only Just, but tenderfully Merciful; Whose

[a] St. John xiv. 9.

Power is wielded by, Whose Wisdom is at the disposal of, His Justice; Whose Justice is—and this the Gospel alone makes plain—reconcilable with, nay, inseparable from, His Love. "To show forth His righteousness,"[a] says St. Paul, is the purpose of the Gospel; to teach men to look up to Heaven as to a Throne of Love, which can never cease to be a Throne of Righteousness, and to cry, in all the languages of mankind, "Abba, Father."[b]

II.

The Gospel is glorious, too, because it sets before man his true greatness; his high and wonderful destiny. It teaches him not merely the facts of his being, but their relative importance to each other. This life, it says, is but an introduction to another, which, having once begun, will last. The one important question for every human being is, how he shall spend that endless future. And that question is decided here. Here, in the humblest homes and occupations; here, in the most unobtrusive, uneventful lives, the same great issue is being settled, day by day, hour by hour; what is to be the place of beings that cannot cease to be, in an eternal world. Compared with that question, the Gospel has taught us to think that all which merely touches this present, passing life, is utterly insignificant. "What shall it profit a man," asked our Lord, "if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"[c] "The things which are seen," says St. Paul solemnly, "are temporal; the things that are not seen are eternal."[d] Certainly man did not learn all about his immortality from Jesus Christ our Lord. He divined

[a] Rom. iii. 25, 26.
[b] *Ib.* viii. 15.
[c] St. Mark viii. 36.
[d] 2 Cor. iv. 18.

it for himself. Or rather, deep down in his soul, there was an instinct of it, side by side with his presentiment of God; there was a voice which told him in his better moods that, although he had an animal form, and although the birth and sustenance and death of his body depended on the same laws as those which governed the creatures around him, yet he had that within him, or rather he himself was that, which could not become extinct. This natural sense of immortality is found to exist in varying degrees in different races of mankind, and in different individuals of the same race. But its strength is not so great as to be a match for the influences which crush it out, unless it is able to rest on some such support as Revelation affords. China is a country where, in the course of ages, man, although surrounded by a material civilization which is in some respects advanced, has almost entirely, or quite, parted with the sense of his being an immortal spirit; and the causes which have there operated so fatally are everywhere at work. There are men in London who once believed themselves to be immortal beings, and who have ceased to do so. It is, not, alas! so difficult first to brutalize the soul, and then to destroy its spiritual eyesight.

And, if the sense of immortality be lost, what a loss it is! How utterly is the idea of life, and with it the idea of duty, dwarfed and degraded in the eyes of a man who sees no horizon beyond the grave! If the power of looking forward, the power of taking a large and comprehensive survey, be of value in this life, what must not its value be in man's existence as a whole! Do you think it adds nothing to high motives, to powers of thought and work, to be able to say sincerely with St. Paul, "We know that when this earthly house of our tabernacle is dissolved, we have a building of God, an

house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens?"[a] Are there not times when the thought of that future nerves us to duty, enables us to bear pain, as remembering our true home and destiny? Depend upon it, where man has lost the sense of his immortality, human life soon takes the character of a purely animal existence, though it be the existence of a very clever animal. Respect for human life, which must rest on the belief that this life is a probation for another, disappears: infanticide, suicide, those darker crimes which startle men, burst forth as in the days of the pagan empire; man has lost his prerogative among the creatures of God. It is the glory of the Gospel to have made the future a certainty to Christians, and so to have transfigured human life. The Gospel alone has done this, consistently with the dignity of a Moral God. The Paradise of Islam would have been a libel on his purity; that of Buddha, could it have been true, on his seriousness of purpose. The guesses of heathendom, the partial disclosures of the Jewish Revelation, pale before the Light of Christ rising from His Tomb. His empty tomb is the decisive and imperishable assurance of our immortality to the end of time. It has been thus brought to light by the Gospel. When He overcame the sharpness of death, He opened that world of spirits to the gaze of all believers.

III.

But, chiefly, the Gospel is glorious because it enables those who obey it to reach the end which God has set before them. What would it have done for us, if it had only told us that God is what He is, or that we are immortal beings on our trial; without enabling us to possess

[a] 2 Cor. v. 1.

God eternally, and so to turn our immortality to account? The speculative truth about God, or about ourselves, however true, would not of itself have blessed us; it would at best have tantalized us by a glimpse of the unattainable. For there are two hindrances which interfere with our reaching the end of our destiny; our sin and our weakness. "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God."[a] The Jews with their revealed Law, the Gentiles with their natural law, are, St. Paul says, equally sinners before God.[b] God, being what He is, cannot approve of sin; it contradicts that moral truth which is His essential Nature. "He is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity."[c] He, for Whom time does not exist, cannot forget what is ever before Him. If He punishes that which He eternally beholds, it is not in revenge or caprice, but because, being perfect Holiness, He cannot overlook a contradiction of His moral Nature. How, then, shall He be just and yet merciful; true to His own perfections, yet compassionate to us? St. Paul answers: "Through the Redemption that is in Christ Jesus."[d] Jesus is sinless; that is His first qualification for His redemptive work. He is made "to be sin for us, Who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him."[e] Jesus lays down His life freely, and, as He says, "of Himself;"[f] He freely wills to bear our burden. That is His second qualification; it destroys every shadow of injustice in the Father's acceptance of this Innocent Sufferer for a guilty world. Thirdly, Jesus, as the Son of Man, or Second Adam, properly represents us. There is nothing fictitious, strained, or artificial in His taking our place upon the Cross; it is a law of nature that a parent may properly represent his children. We have only to claim our share

[a] Rom. iii. 23. [b] *Ib.* i. 18–32; ii. 14–24. [c] Hab. i. 13.
[d] Rom. iii. 24. [e] 2 Cor. v. 21. [f] St. John x. 18.

in Him, in His Righteousness, His Propitiation; and to do this we reach out the hand of faith, while He, on His part, bestows through Baptism, or other means of grace, the gift for which we ask. Thus, "being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."[a] "In Whom we have redemption through His Blood, even forgiveness of sins."[b] That is man's first need: that is the first great gift of the Gospel; it wipes out the sinful past; it robes us in the Righteousness of the Sinless Son of God.

But we are not merely sinful; we are weak. We cannot in our own strength be true to our new conscience, even when past sins have been washed away. Does our Lord help us in this, too? Yes, St. Paul replies; most assuredly He does. "What the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh"—that is, in the very seat of its power—"that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit;"[c] so that "the Law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus makes free from the law of sin and death."[d] That Holy and Adorable Person—the Eternal Spirit of the Father and of Christ—makes it His work to unite Christians to Christ, by giving them the graces which resided in Christ in unstinted fulness. Thus through His action, "as many as are baptized into Christ have put on Christ;"[e] and "Christ is in us" as "the Hope of glory;"[f] and—it seems a paradox, but St. Paul will say it—"we can do all things through Christ That strengtheneth us."[g]

My brethren, there are two practical questions which you ought in all seriousness to ask yourselves.

[a] Rom. v. 1. [b] Eph. i. 7. [c] Rom. viii. 3, 4. [d] *Ib.* 2.
[e] Gal. iii. 27. [f] Col. i. 27. [g] Phil. iv. 13.

1. Ask yourselves first, "What has the glorious Gospel of the Blessed God done for me?" Each one of you knows that he has been so many years within reach of this message from God, within reach of these Heaven-sent gifts? What has come of it? God has revealed Himself: what is His place in your thoughts? He has pointed out to you the certainty, the prospects, the boundless possibilities, of the future life. Are you living in view of it? He has given His Blessed Son to die for you, His Eternal Spirit to sanctify you; and you are in contact, if you could only see it, with the immense realities which bring pardon and sanctification and peace. What is your condition? Are you still the slaves of sin? are you still pleading your natural weakness for the absence of any growth in holiness?

Few persons, surely, can have read the account of the loss of the great French passenger ship,[a] which appeared in the morning papers of Tuesday last, without a heart-ache. The world is full of suffering; some twenty-five or twenty-six thousand souls,[b] it is calculated, pass out of life in every twenty-four hours. But the ordinary activity of death is distributed over the surface of the globe. We do not realize it. The catastrophe of the 22nd of November meant suffering of the sharpest kind brought to a focus. Think of those men and women and children, like yourselves, roused from their sleep in a winter's night to find that they had some twelve minutes to live, ere they must sink into a grave beneath the waves; and ask yourselves, "Had I been on board, how would

[a] The *Ville du Havre*, which was sunk on the 22nd of November, 1873, by collision with a sailing ship off the Azores. More than two hundred lives were lost.

[b] This is probably much too low an estimate. Other calculations make the number of daily deaths not less than 80,000.

it have been with me?" What are the convictions upon which, in such a moment of supreme agony, you could fall back in order to share the simple resignation of not a few, blessed be God, of those who died in the *Ville du Havre;* in order to bow your head and say, 'Father, into Thy Hands I commend my spirit'?"[a] If you have reason to fear that the glorious Gospel has not really delivered you from that fear of death which, as the Apostle puts it, makes many men throughout their lifetime subject to bondage,[b] then surely you have solemn work to do in this Advent. And if, through God's grace, you humbly trust that you too could, at a short notice, sing your *Nunc Dimittis* and lie down to die; then there is another question which must be asked.

2. That Gospel which has done everything for you—what have you done for it, for Him of Whom it speaks, for Him Who gave it? If you know anything about it, you know that it is no more meant only for yourselves, or your families, or your parish, or your country, than the sun above your heads is meant for the street in which you live. True, the sun shines, whether men will or not, on all the valleys and mountains of the world; while the Gospel, with its sunshine for the human soul, is made dependent for its propagation on the active loyalty of those who have already received it. What have you done to propagate that clear knowledge of God, that wide vision of Eternity, those channels of pardon and of sanctification? Other men have a right to it no less than you: as St. Paul said, you owe it them. "I am debtor to the Greeks and to the Barbarians."[c] Others have to face the burden of life, and the mystery of death, and the pangs of conscience, and the enervation of will which distress

[a] St. Luke xxiii. 46. [b] Heb. ii. 15. [c] Rom. i. 14.

you. Have you had, I will not say the religious zeal, but the humanity to help them? Yes! for a believing Christian, the propagation of the Gospel is an act, not of exceptional religious chivalry, but of pure human feeling for our fellow-men. It is just as humane as is the support of a hospital; only it is an act of higher and more far-sighted philanthropy. You may not, you dare not, if the pulse of Christian life beats within you, leave the heathen as they are without an effort to save them. If you cannot reach them yourselves, you can reach them through others. You can interest yourselves in a particular mission, a particular missionary, a particular Diocese; you can pray for it, collect money for it, assure those who are working for Christ far away from friends and home of your respect and sympathy. You cannot do better than trust so old and faithful a servant of the Church of England as is the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel to help you to discharge this your great obligation to the heathen and to your Lord. Something you must do, if your Christianity is genuine; and you will best decide what you ought to do, when you think of that Gospel, which, if you can sincerely call it glorious, has made God and Eternity welcome to you, and has endowed you with freedom and strength and peace.

SERMON IX.

RELIGIOUS RETIREMENT.

(THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT.)

ISA. XXVI. 20, 21.

Come, My people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee: hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast. For, behold, the Lord cometh out of His place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity.

THE twenty-fourth and three following chapters of Isaiah form a group of prophecies by themselves. They are, in several respects, unlike any other portion of the writings of this Prophet. They have more in common with the last six chapters of Zechariah than with anything else in the Old Testament. They speak everywhere more constantly, more pathetically than Isaiah elsewhere speaks, of some vast and approaching catastrophe.

I.

Of what catastrophe the Prophet was thinking it is not easy, in some passages, to determine.

Isaiah certainly seems to be setting out from certain well-known historical circumstances of his own and the immediately succeeding age. But, then, as he handles them, they appear to change their character; the outward

historical form fades or falls away, and the far-off events which are to be at the very end of time come into view. It is as in Turner's pictures, where heaven and earth are often blended so delicately that it is impossible to say exactly where the one melts into the other; it is as in real nature, where even practised eyes cannot always be certain whether they see a line of distant mountains or a bank of clouds. In the spiritual world there is at times a corresponding indistinctness, arising from the likeness which exists between God's several visitations; between the less and the greater, the national and the world-embracing, those which take place in time and those which close it. Just as, in our Lord's discourse, the approaching destruction of Jerusalem and the Day of Judgment are almost inextricably blended in His treatment of both;[a] so here, the immediate external facts of the history of Isaiah's own time are constantly intertwined with the tremendous events which they did but foreshadow. Thus, the attempts which some modern writers have made to connect the imperial city whose destruction is predicted in this group of prophecies with either Nineveh or Babylon exclusively, are not successful; because, in point of fact, the history which seems to be present is, in the Prophet's hand, the emblem or the drapery of an indefinitely distant future. The successive judgments against the heathen point to a last and comprehensive judgment; and the full meaning of the Prophet, while hidden, as St. Peter would seem to imply,[b] from his own mind, is to be found in the pages of the New Testament, and especially in the discourses of our Lord and Saviour.

No doubt the generation which heard these words would have thought of some visible judgment upon the heathen powers which were then threatening the chosen

[a] St. Matt. xxiv; xxv. [b] 1 St. Pet. i. 11, 12.

people with extreme disaster, if not with annihilation. He Who had chosen Israel, also ruled the world; but it might have seemed that He was allowing events to take their course. Great pagan monarchies were steadily advancing in their careers of conquest; the earth was stained with innocent blood; the dead were buried away out of sight; violence seemed to have carried the day against a Providence of order and justice. It was not really so, Isaiah proclaims. God does not hide away His Face because, for the moment, He does not interfere. Just as a Psalmist speaks of the Lord "arising"[a] to Judgment, and, more boldly, of His "awaking as one out of sleep, and like a giant refreshed with wine"[b] to smite His enemies; so here the Prophet exclaims, as if the vision of the reality were passing before his eyes, "Behold, the Lord cometh out of His place to visit the iniquity of the inhabitants of the earth upon them." This language, of course, like that in the passage from the Psalms, is meant to enable us men to understand what is altogether above us. When the remarkable expression, "The Lord cometh out of His place," is used, we must not, of course, think that the Omnipresent really moves from one point to another in that Universe which is His Work, and which, while He fills it, does not contain Him within its bounds; any more than, in using the Psalter, we can think of Him as literally "lying down," or as "slumbering and sleeping."[c] Nor may we suppose that, as it has been phrased, He goes out of His own Divine Life; or that, in order to execute any purpose, however awful or magnificent, He suspends that Everlasting Rest in which He dwells. This vivid expression of the Prophet's is, in fact, what is called an accommodation; an accommodation of the language which we should naturally use, when speak-

[a] Ps. lxxvi. 9. [b] *Ib.* lxxviii. 66. [c] *Ib.* cxxi. 4.

ing of finite beings like ourselves, to the actions of the Infinite Being. Isaiah had told, in his account of the vision which he saw in the year that King Uzziah died, how God ever manifests Himself to the great intelligences of Heaven;[a] but without ceasing to do this, He makes His Will felt from time to time in human history. He thus, as it were, goes forth out of His place, equipped for judgment through extraordinary providences, to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity; He goes forth when the course of the world is for the moment no longer peaceably ordered by His governance; "He sendeth forth lightnings with the rain, bringing the winds out of His treasures."[b] Again and again this intervention of God in judgment has occurred in human history, ancient and modern, sacred and profane. Again and again the natural flow of human circumstances, if we may reverently use that expression, has been interrupted. God has spoken in the language of events to an astonished world. Such events, in which men heard His Voice, were the successive captivities of Israel and Judah; such was the final destruction of Jerusalem; such, on a larger scale, was the fall of the Roman Empire, when the whole structure of civilized human life seemed to be dissolving into ruin; such, again, was the conquest of Eastern Christendom by Islam, and the great Tartar invasions of the Middle Ages, and the astonishing career of the First Napoleon, and may we not add, the events of the year 1870, which a trial of unusual importance in a neighbouring country has recalled so vividly to our memories within the past week?[c] It is not that God does not act and rule in all the least circumstances

[a] Isa. vi. 1-8. [b] Ps. cxxxv. 7.

[c] The allusion is to the trial of Marshal Bazaine in Paris. It was concluded Dec. 10, 1873.

of history; it is that in these immense catastrophes, He makes His purpose startlingly plain; men feel that He is passing by, and passing in judgment.

All these events, and many others in the past, and many, it may be, that are yet to follow, are only preparatory to, and shadows of, a final judgment; the last utterance of the Divine Mind in respect of us His moral creatures. "When the Son of Man shall come in His Glory, and all His Holy Angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His Glory: and before Him shall be gathered all nations: and He shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth the sheep from the goats."[a] Then, indeed, the expression, "The Lord cometh out of His place," will receive, as it would seem, a literal fulfilment. Clothed in that Human Body which He took of His Virgin Mother, and in which He suffered on the Cross, the Son of Man will appear visibly moving, as through space, surrounded by hosts of attendant and adoring Spirits, and summoning to judgment all who have ever received at His Hands the gift of rational life. It will not be, as before, the felt action of an Unseen Providence; it will be a revelation, palpable to sense, of our Ascended Lord, moving from His place at the "Right Hand of the Majesty on High"[b] to "judge the earth in righteousness, and to minister true judgment unto the peoples."[c]

II.

Now, all of these judgments—the less, and the greater, and the greatest of all—are a call to solitude, to religious reflection, to prayer. The language of the invitation implies the antiquity of the Pentateuch, since it is shaped

[a] St. Matt. xxv. 31, 32. [b] Heb. i. 3. [c] Ps. ix. 8.

by the account of the Flood in Genesis. Just as Noah, whom the Lord shut into the ark, was hidden in the ark while the waters of destruction poured down around him, and thus floated in safety upon the very waves which formed the grave of a guilty world,[a] so, when God's judgments are in the earth, it is natural for His servants to withdraw into the chambers of prayer, in obedience to an invitation which conscience cannot well fail to hear. "Come, My people, enter into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee, hide thyself as it were for a little moment."

Here let us inquire what is the object of the retirement thus enjoined on Israel.

1. Israel, in retirement, will see that God is the Author of the judgments on the nations—on the great monarchies of the Eastern world. One of the faults of this people which haunted it from age to age, was that it did not see God in history; in its own history, in the history of the world.

> "The ox knoweth his owner,
> And the ass his master's crib:
> But Israel doth not know,
> My people doth not consider."[b]

So Isaiah had opened his prophecy, many years before; and it was still true. Israel, chosen for such high destinies, out of all the races of the world; Israel, endowed with a code and institutions of higher than earthly origin, was yet perpetually feeling and acting as if God had left men to their own resources. This spirit was at the bottom of most of the great acts of rebellion against God's authority mentioned in the Sacred Books; as notably when the people insisted on setting aside the provisions

[a] Gen. vii. 16–18. [b] Isa. i. 3.

of the Law and on having a king, like the nations around them. The same temper of mind would lead them to miss the meaning of God's judgments, or rather, to overlook the fact that they were His at all.

Is it not much the same among ourselves? How do the majority of us look at passing events, and especially at misfortunes, whether they happen to the world at large, or to our own country, or to our own families? If we think about them steadily, we trace them to their "causes;" to their "second causes," as our popular language religiously puts it; that is, to the forces or events which immediately produce these misfortunes. We have failed in some commercial enterprise; it was all owing to the stupidity of this clerk or that correspondent. We have suffered from a railway accident; if we had only had the sense to go by the previous train, or if the pointsman had not been half asleep, it would never have happened. We have lost a near friend or relation; had he not been so imprudent about his diet or exposure to a cold wind, he might have lived till sixty. Or, he had a heart-disease—everybody knew that—and the wonder was that he could live as long as he did.

Do I say that we ought not to trace misfortunes at all, in this way, to their immediate sources? Certainly not. God has given us our reason that we should use it. A knowledge of the causes which immediately promote or retard our temporal well-being is of practical importance to all of us; and, we may venture to say, strictly in accordance with His Will Who placed us here. But surely we ought not to stop at these secondary causes, as if they were original forces; as if they were gods, to all intents and purposes; as if there were no Power behind to set them in motion, or control or check them; no Cause of causes, Who is the real Agent always and every-

where. For this way of looking at life is really pagan. Paganism has generally been the worship of a variety of second causes, thrown into some personified shape, and generally accompanied by a kind of supplementary deity called chance, or fortune, who is made responsible for those districts of life and thought of which no complete account could be given out of our experience. No serious believer in a living God should content himself with referring only to the secondary causes of that which happens to himself or to the world. To do so is to forget God; it is to be practically Atheistic. And if we would see God behind the agencies which He employs in judgment or in mercy, when governing us and the world, we must detach ourselves from the imperious and blinding power of sense; we must retire within the chambers of the soul into an atmosphere of prayer. There we meet, or may meet, with God; He is present in the depths of our inmost being. Our outer man, living amid material things, living on the surface of life, misses God and forgets Him; our inner man ought to see Him in the sanctuary of the soul, and then to reinterpret Nature and the course of events by the vision which it has seen. Israel must retire into the chambers of the soul, if he would understand that the disasters which overtake states or individuals are ultimately due, not to lack of resources, or opportunities, or energy, but to the Will of the Perfect Moral Being, Who acts through these circumstances, and acts consistently with His character as a Moral Judge.

2. Israel, in retirement, may learn something of God's purposes in temporal judgments. What a judgment means is not always or generally apparent; it only appears upon consideration; and it is missed if we do not make a serious effort to discover it. In his autobiography the

late Mr. Mill has said many things which no Christian can read without distress; but he has made some true and forcible remarks on the "deterioration" which those persons suffer who abandon themselves unreservedly to the claims of society.[a] Society rubs off the finer edges of character and perception; it jealously imposes a dead level of sentiment upon the mass of its votaries; and any man who would retain the fresh enthusiasms which God has given him, or would increase in clear-sightedness as to truth and duty, and in strength and rectitude of will, must make up his mind to sit lightly to it. He may not retire from it altogether, but he will be a visitor, rather than a resident, within its precincts; he will not take his tone from it, or accept its dictation. This general principle has its application in spiritual things as well as in the things which chiefly interested Mr. Mill. Society, as a whole, has no eye for the drift of the judgments of God; the experience which it has to give is not a good substitute for the experience of a man who can stand apart now and then from the main currents of life, on some "watch-tower"[b]—to use the language of prophecy—and so can win the illumination of prayer. Those who are commanding in the thick of an engagement do not perceive how the battle is going so well as an observer on the neighbouring heights. Elijah the hermit prophet, haunting the rocks of Horeb and the slopes of Carmel, knew more of the true interests of Israel than did the courtiers who thronged Ahab's palace in Jezreel. For prayer clears the eye of the soul; Israel, secluded in his chambers, will see further than the statesmen and warriors

[a] *Autobiography*, pp. 58, 59; cf. p. 74. Not that the justice of Mr. Mill's comparison between England and France in this respect is at all apparent.

[b] Isa. xxi. 8.

on the Euphrates. God, Who rules the world, unveils His Mind to pure and holy men while He hides it from the wise and prudent.[a]

Who can doubt that every judgment falling on the nations, the families, the persons around us ought to force each man to ask himself, What warning does this bring to me? Am I living for judgment? Am I washed from my sins in the Precious Blood of Christ? Am I in a state of grace, and able to hope that when at last the stars shall fall and the powers of heaven shall be shaken, I shall be able to take refuge in God? What does God condemn, in this judgment, that He may also see to condemn in me? To ask and answer these questions honestly is to understand that precious saying, "They had an eye unto Him, and were lightened: and their faces were not ashamed."[b] To study the Mind of God in His judgments in time, is to learn to read the signs of the Son of Man in heaven;[c] it is to prepare, in the most intelligent and effective way, for the Final Doom.

3. Israel, in retirement and prayer, may have power to stay the judgments of God. The Israel of Isaiah's day could do little or nothing in action; the great days of national empire and enterprise had passed away. The questions to be fought out on the Nile and the Euphrates would be decided by other hands than those which still wielded the sceptre of David and Solomon. But, by intercession, Israel might yet do much. Ezekiel teaches us that holy men, such as Noah, Daniel, and Job, have power with God in prayer;[d] that their prayers exert a real influence on the course of events. Elijah is even represented as bringing about, by his prayers, the great

[a] St. Matt. xi. 25.
[b] Ps. xxxiv. 5.
[c] St. Matt. xxiv. 30.
[d] Ezek. xiv. 14–20.

drought which distressed Samaria, and as removing it by the same means. "He prayed earnestly," says St. James, "that it might not rain: and it rained not upon the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit."[a]

We cannot, of course, say that his, or any prayers, caused God to change a purpose which He had formed. But we know that, in God's predestination of events, these prayers were foreseen and included as causes which should be really operative in bringing about whatever He willed to happen. If prayer can thus reach the physical and inanimate world, much more can it reach the moral and human world. And so now, while the world goes on its way, as if it held its own future proudly in its hand, its course is really swayed by those of whom it takes least account; by poor and uninfluential and simple people, who live much alone with God, and have ready access to His Ear and His Heart. Israel in his chambers, Isaiah would say, might yet do more for the future of the world than a conquering but prayerless monarch, even though he were ruling, with David's sway, from the Euphrates to the Mediterranean.

Such is Israel's power—subject, of course, to the overruling Wisdom and Love of God—until the end. Then, indeed, no intercession will avail to stay the Arm of Eternal Justice; Israel will only seek or claim protection amid the ruins of a falling world.

A few practical words in conclusion.

See here the meaning to many a man in active life of a serious illness. He cannot hope, he says, ever to make leisure for himself; business, friends, circumstances,

[a] St. James v. 17, 18.

take possession of him; he is in a whirl of incessant occupation from morning till night. If he does not altogether forget the great realities—God, the soul, the Cross, death, Eternity—he does not think much about them. How should he? He has no time that he can call his own. He has no spare energy; his mind is overburdened by the claims of business. His habits, too, are formed; he would be unhappy if he did not work up to the high-pressure level. His spirits and strength keep pace, as yet, with his habits; or if for a moment the demands of work are set aside, it is only that strength and spirits may be recruited, and that he may return to his occupation with renewed vigour.

To such a man God often speaks in mercy, through an illness which brings him low, even to the very gates of death. "Come, My son," He says, "enter thou into thy chamber, and shut thy doors about thee: hide thyself as it were for a little moment, prepare for judgment. For, behold, the Lord cometh out of His place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity." He is stricken with a malady which confines him to the chamber of sickness for many weeks or months. And, if all his vital force does not at once give way, his greatest difficulty in the earliest stage of illness is not how to bear the bodily discomfort and pain, but how to adopt the new habits of a sick-room; to resign himself to the society of nurses during the long weary day; to get through the sleepless hours at night, and then to begin the monotonous day again; to hear of the activity and works of those whom he has left, and to be content to be powerless; to think of the hopes and enterprises of a few days ago, and to know that they must be abandoned, perhaps for ever. For a man of energy and restlessness, this side of illness is very hard to bear; it is one of the reasons why men are so

much less courageous and collected in times of sickness than are women. And yet this enforced detachment from earthly occupations is the purpose of the visitation; it is the certificate of the Love of Him Who sends it. God has a controversy with that man's soul; and it must be argued out, step by step, in those hours of weariness, of silence, of unwelcome inactivity. God will not allow him to pass hence ere he has considered well such questions as these—Why art thou here? Whither art thou going? What is thy soul's chief hope? What its deepest dread? "You have suffered long and greatly," said a Bishop to a distinguished statesman, whom he was visiting on his sick-bed. "Yes," was the answer; "but, knowing what I know now, I would not for all that this world can give have been spared one hour or one pang of my illness."[a]

Note in this text, too, how blessed death must be for those who are prepared to die. What is death for such men but retirement from a perishing world into an inner chamber, where the spirit holds converse with God? An old writer tells us that he was reminded of this passage in Isaiah when he visited those remarkable sepulchres of the Early Christian Dead, the Catacombs beneath the city of Rome. As he looked on those narrow cells, cut out in the soft rock, with a brief inscription on a tablet in front of each, and read how first one and then another aged man, or youth, or maiden, had, in one of the persecutions, laid down life itself for Christ, he could not but feel that God had called that soul to enter into the chambers of the blessed dead, and hide itself for a little moment, until the indignation was overpast; until the

[a] The statesman was Lord Liverpool. Bishop Lloyd told the story to Dr. Pusey, from whom I heard it.

heathen tyrants and the heathen empire, too, should have gone their way; until the Day of Resurrection should dawn, when the Lord Jesus would come out of His Place for judgment, and the martyr would enter on his new and splendid inheritance of Life. And in thinking of some of those who have been taken from us during this past year, this same idea of death, as a forced withdrawal into the silence of communion with God alone, presents itself. They have escaped the strife of this world of sorrows; they know something of what is meant by the peace of Christ.

Observe, lastly, the duty of every Christian who thinks seriously, at such a time as Advent. You ought to make a virtue of what, ere long, will be a necessity, if God loves you and does not leave you to yourselves. You ought, now and then, to come apart into a desert place with Christ and His disciples and rest awhile; you should enter into your chambers, and shut your doors, and hide yourselves a little moment. The value of religious Retreats will scarcely be disputed by any serious Christian.[a] It is not prudent to leave everything to a future which may never come. It is not prudent to calculate upon a long gradual approach through a lingering illness, or an imperceptible decline, to the gate of the Eternal World. A runaway cart which overtakes you at a street-crossing, or a railway train that misses the points at a junction, may thrust you in a moment into the Presence Chamber of the King of Heaven. One hour a week, or one afternoon or a part of it in a month, given seriously, and with complete determination of purpose, to thinking out,

[a] Since the date of this sermon, the practice of holding Retreats, or, as they are sometimes oddly termed, "Quiet Days," has happily become general.

wrestling out, praying out the question of your soul's real relation to the Eternal Future, would be, indeed, time well and economically spent. It would be time upon which you would look back from another world with real and thankful satisfaction. Indeed, if we know what it really means, all prayer is but preparation for the Supreme Moment; for that sight of Him, before Whom heaven and earth shall flee away;[a] for that sight which awaits every man that is born into the world, and which will be to each one of us so full of unspeakable anguish or of unutterable joy.

[a] St. Matt. xxiv. 35.

SERMON X.

THE INCARNATION.

(FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT.)

GAL. IV. 4.

When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman.

WHY is it that the Great Festivals of the Christian Church do so much less for many of us than might have been expected, in the way of helping us to understand and to live by the great Truths of the Christian Creed? One answer which may be given to that question is that we do not prepare for them. We allow ourselves to drift up to the morning of the day without giving it a thought; and the consequence is that its brief hours have passed before we have made any serious effort to enter into its idea and object. Now, one design of the Church of Christ in observing such seasons as Advent and Lent, is to lead Christians to think of what is meant by Christmas and Easter before they actually arrive; and it is in keeping with this intention that I invite you this afternoon[a] to consider the words in which St. Paul describes the event which Christmas commemorates, namely, the coming of the Eternal Son of God

[a] Preached on the Fourth Sunday in Advent.

by His Incarnation into this our world. St. Paul's words lead us to consider, first, how the event was prepared for, and secondly, what it was in itself. "When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman."

I.

"When the fulness of the time was come." This remarkable expression, "the fulness of time," is, with a slight variation, once used by St. Paul elsewhere: he calls the Gospel, when writing to the Ephesians, "the dispensation of the fulness of times."[a] In both cases he means by "fulness" that which fulfils or brings to completion; the arrival of a given moment which completes an epoch; the hour which fills up its appointed measure and brings it to a close. It was in a like sense that our Lord and His Apostles used the word "hour" as marking a particular point in His Life, determined in the counsels of God. His mother, at Cana of Galilee, does not know that the "hour" of His self-manifestation has not yet come.[b] The woman of Samaria is told that the hour cometh when the true worshippers would worship the Father neither in Mount Gerizim nor in Jerusalem;[c] at Pentecost the whole world would become an oratory. The Jews are solemnly warned that "the hour is coming, and now is, when the" morally "dead shall hear the Voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live."[d] When our Lord's first-cousins pressed Him to go to Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles, "My time," He said, "is not yet come."[e] On the other hand, "when Jesus knew

[a] Eph. i. 10, πλήρωμα τῶν καιρῶν. On the sense of πλήρωμα, see Meyer, *in loc.*, Gal. i. 10.

[b] St. John ii. 4.

[c] *Ib.* iv. 21.

[d] *Ib.* v. 25.

[e] *Ib.* vii. 6.

that His hour was come,"[a] He proceeded to wash His disciples' feet; and, "when the hour was come, He sat down with the Twelve;"[b] and, when the traitor-apostle draws near in Gethsemane, "The hour is at hand," He says; "the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners."[c] In all these passages "the hour" means a point of time of critical importance, up to which all that had previously happened had led, from which all was afterwards to date. The Passion was especially the hour of Christ; the Birth of Christ was the hour of the world. It was "the fulness of time."

All such language is only fully understood when we bear in mind that that succession of events which, looking at it from our human point of view, we men call time, is distributed upon a plan eternally present to the Divine Mind; and that particular persons or particular characters are assigned, in Heaven, their predestinated place in this succession. "To everything," says the Wise Man, "there is a season, and a time for every purpose under Heaven."[d]

All the lesser incidents of our lives are really arranged in a preconcerted order. There is a "fulness of time" at which, and not before, we can understand particular truths or undertake particular duties, because for these truths or duties all that has preceded has been a preparation. "My time," we may say in this sense, "is in Thy Hand."[e] This is peculiarly true of that last awful moment which awaits us all, and for which all that precedes it is a preparation—the moment of death. To God's servants, it comes when they are ripe for it; it comes, by the appointment of Eternal Love, in "the fulness of time." In like manner it is true generally of those whom the world recognizes as its great men, that each appears in "the

[a] St. John xiii. 1–5. [b] St. Luke xxii. 14. [c] St. Matt. xxvi. 45.
[d] Eccles. iii. 1. [e] Ps. xxxi. 17.

fulness of time." Each has his predestined hour, which he may not anticipate. He is in some sense the ripe product of the ages of thought and feeling and labour which have elapsed before he comes; and that he should appear when he does, is just as much willed by the Providence of God as that he should be born at all. So it is with writers, artists, statesmen, even discoverers; when such men are said to be "before their age," it is only meant that their age has not yet taken its own measure, and that they surprise it by the discovery. They really appear, one and all, in "the fulness of time."

Now, our Lord's arrival on the scene of human history corresponds with the general law so far as this; that He came when a course of preparation, conducted through previous ages, was complete. But He was not the product of His own or of any preceding age. What is true of great men, who are only great men, is not true of Him. They receive from their age as much as they give it; they embody and reflect its spirit; they seize upon the ideas which are in circulation, and, whether by speech or action, express them more vividly than do others; their generation does a great deal for them; it is pleased with them because it sees itself reflected in them; and their power with it is often in an inverse ratio to their real originality. With our Lord it was otherwise. He owed nothing to the time or to the country which witnessed His Advent; He had no contact with the world of Greek thought, or of Roman politics and administration. He borrowed Rabbinical language enough to make Himself intelligible; but no Rabbi could have said, or could have omitted to say, what He did. The preceding ages only prepared His way before Him, by forming the circumstances, the convictions, the moral experience of His countrymen and others; and thus a preceding period,

marked in the counsels of God, had to be run out. At last its final hour had struck, and that hour was "the fulness of time;" it was the moment of the Advent.

There was a threefold work of preparation for the coming of the Son of God carried forward in what was then called the civilized world, and each portion of it required the lapse of a certain time.

First, the world was to be prepared politically for His work. In order to spread an idea or a creed, two instruments, if not strictly necessary, are at least desirable. Of these, the first is a common language, such as the French language was in Europe half a century ago; a language of civilization, which shall be a means for expressing new thoughts and convictions without subjecting them to misrepresentation or injury by the process of translation. The second is a common social system, common laws, a common government.

The first of these conditions was partly provided by the conquests of Alexander. He spread the Greek language throughout Western Asia and Egypt. And when Greece was conquered by Rome, educated Romans learnt the language of the vanquished province. Thus, when our Lord came, the Greek language, in which the New Testament was written, was the common tongue of the civilized world; it was ready to St. Paul's hand for his missionary work. And, during the half-century which preceded the Birth of Christ, the Roman Empire was finally consolidated into a political whole; Palestine and Spain, North Africa and South Germany, were administered by a single government. Christianity did not, indeed, need this. It passed beyond the frontiers of the Roman Empire in the lifetime of the Apostles. The earliest translation of the New Testament was made into Syriac, in the second

century; and it showed that the Church could dispense with Greek. But the preparation of a common language was undoubtedly an important element in the process by which preceding ages led up to the "fulness of time."

There was a second preparation in the convictions of mankind. The heathen nations were not without some religion, which contained, in various degrees, elements of truth, however mingled with or overlaid by errors. Had it not been for the truth which is to be found in all forms of heathenism, they could not have lasted as they did. Had there not been much true religious feeling in the ancient world, although lavished often upon unworthy and miserable objects, the noble characters with whom we meet in history could not have existed. But from the first the ancient religions tended to bury God in the visible world which witnessed to Him. Those powers of nature which are only His modes of working were increasingly regarded as separate objects of devout veneration: the principle was the same in the Fetichism which found a god in some block of wood or stone; and in the Pantheism which looked forward to the absorption of individual beings in Nature's universal life. The Greeks never knew, in their best days, of a literally Almighty God, still less of a God of love; but it was necessary that their incapacity to retain in their knowledge[a] the little they did know of Him should be proved by experience. Certainly wise men tried to spiritualize the popular language and ideas about God. But the old paganism would not bear such handling; it went to pieces when it was discussed; while philosophy, having no facts to appeal to, but consisting only of "views," could never become a religion and take its place. The consequence was the simultaneous growth of gross superstition and

[a] Rom. i. 28.

blank unbelief, down to the time of the Incarnation. Never before was the existence of any god so widely denied as in the age of the first Cæsars; never were there so many magicians, incantations, rites of the most debased and debasing kind, as in that age. The most gifted of races had done their best with heathenism; and the result was, that the wisest and purest minds loathed the present and looked forward to the future. It was "the fulness of time." The epoch of religious experiments had passed into an epoch of despair, which was only not altogether hopeless.

There was also a preparation in the moral experience of mankind. There was at times much moral earnestness in the old pagan world. But men were content with being good citizens, which is not necessarily the same thing as being good men. In the eyes of Socrates, for instance, all obligations were discharged if a man obeyed the laws of Athens. "No man," St. Augustine has said, "approached Christianity more nearly than did Plato."[a] Yet Plato tolerated popular vices of the gravest description, and drew a picture of a model state in which there was to be a community of wives. The moral teachers whom St. Paul afterwards found at Athens were Epicureans or Stoics; they practically divided the ancient world between them in his day. The Stoic morality has often been compared with Christianity; it differed from it vitally. Every Stoic virtue was dictated by pride, just as every Epicurean virtue was inspired by the wish to economize the sources of pleasure. "Nowadays," says a pagan writer, "the greatest vices are concealed under the name of philosophy;"[b] and the morality of the masses of men, whom the

[a] *De Civ. Dei.*, viii. 5. Quoted by Luthardt, *Apol. Vorles.* viii.

[b] Quintil., *Inst. Orat.*, Proœm. 15: "Nostris vero temporibus sub hoc nomine maxima in plerisque vitia latuerunt."

philosophers could not and did not care to influence, was what might be supposed. The dreadful picture of the pagan world, which St. Paul draws at the beginning of his Epistle to the Romans, is not darker than that of pagan writers; of moralists like Seneca, of satirists like Juvenal, of historians like Tacitus.

And yet enough survived of moral truth in the human conscience to condemn average pagan practice. Pagans still had, however obscurely, some parts of the Law of God written in their hearts. Men saw and approved the better course; they followed the worse. The natural law was thus to them only a revelation of sin and of weakness; it led them to yearn for a deliverer, although their aspirations towards Him were vague and fitful. Still this widespread corruption, and this longing for better things, marked the close of the period of moral experiments; it announced that "the fulness of time" had come.

In the Jewish people also a threefold preparation, ending also in a "fulness of time," is certainly not less observable. Politically, the Jews were expecting change; they retained the feelings while they had lost the privileges of a free people; their aspirations looked to a better future, though they mistook its character. The sceptre had departed from Judah: Shiloh would come, they believed, immediately. Their purely religious convictions pointed in the same direction. Prophecy had, in the course of ages, completed its picture of the coming Deliverer. Beginning with the indefinite promise of a deliverance, it had gradually narrowed the fulfilment to a particular race, a particular nation, a particular tribe, a particular family; the Birth, the Work, the Humiliations, the Death, the Triumph, of the Deliverer had been described by anticipation. It was four hundred years since the last prophet had spoken; and during

the interval the nation had been particularly active in arranging, comparing, discussing, weighing, the great treasures of the past. There was, consequently, an "expectation of Israel" [a] for which all good men were waiting. God had spoken by the mouth of His holy prophets, which had been since the world began, that Israel would be saved from his enemies.[b] The hour had come; and men were watching every sign that it could give. But, above all, the Jews underwent a moral preparation for the Son of God. God had given them a Law; in itself "holy, just, and good." [c] But this Law itself pronounced a curse on all who did not keep it. Did the Jews keep it? They had had the experience of centuries; had they ever kept it? Were they not as far as ever from keeping it, in any sense which conscience could sanction? They had, no doubt, made a certain number of technical extracts from it, and these they could obey mechanically. But the moral principles which it contained did not govern their lives. And they knew it. The Law, then, was to them a revelation of weakness and a revelation of sin. It showed them what, in their natural strength, they could not do. Like a lantern carried into a dark chamber of horrors which was unlighted before, it showed them what they had done. Thus the Law was, in St. Paul's eyes, a confidential servant to whom God had entrusted the education of Israel, to bring him to Christ; [d] and this process had just reached completion. "The fulness of time" had come.

II.

It had come. And then "God sent forth His Son." Before we weigh these words, let us ask ourselves a ques-

[a] St. Luke ii. 25.
[b] *Ib.* i. 70, 71.
[c] Rom. vii. 12.
[d] Gal. iii. 24.

tion. Had we seen Christ in His earthly Life, and freely opened our souls, without prejudice, to the impression He could have produced upon them, what would that impression have been? First of all, we should have observed that He stood in a totally different relation towards moral truth from that of all other men whom we had ever seen. In all other men, even the very best, there is a struggle, at some time, in some shape, between God's holy Law and their own wills. Moral law is in some respects a trial to them; if not in this respect, yet in that; if not conspicuously, yet in private. The greatest men, it has been said, cannot bear close moral inspection; they look better at a distance. When we come near them, we perceive a jar, an inconsistency, a weakness, an exaggeration, which had not appeared before. We hear them sigh with St. Paul, "The good which I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do."[a] To this rule Jesus Christ was a solitary exception. His Life, looked at however closely, breathes sinlessness, freedom, peace. He never confesses to any sin, however slight. He never asks for pardon, or for reconciliation with the Father; while we feel He is always close to the Father, in Whose searching Light all sins are made clear to the conscience. There are sins, especially those of pride and self-righteousness, which He rebukes with unsparing severity; while yet He challenges the world, "Which of you convinceth Me of sin?"[b] Out of the depths of sanctity and peace within Him, He warns, invites, commands, the human beings around Him in language which none other has ever used. He bids them come to Him,[c] learn of Him,[d] follow Him;[e] and, such is the perfect consistency of His Life, that we do not resent or complain of this as if it were unwarrantable.

[a] Rom. vii. 19. [b] St. John viii. 46.
[c] St. Matt. xi. 28. [d] *Ib.* 29. [e] *Ib.* xvi. 24.

There is that in Him which justifies it; there is an absolute moral purity and robustness which is unique among men. For such a Being the moral Law is no yoke; to Him it can bring no curse; it does but express His character in human words; He is strictly in harmony with it.[a]

Not merely is His Life sinless; it is well-adjusted. No one element of excellence in Jesus is presented in such proportions as to overbalance another. Properly speaking, He has not what we moderns generally mean by character. Character consists in the excess of some element of goodness, in a disproportion which constitutes the individual type. In St. Paul and St. Peter, for example, there is strongly developed character; in their Master there is not, because all in Him is balanced and well adjusted. Thus among good men we see that some are given to the study of speculative truth or to contemplation; others as exclusively to practical efforts. St. Paul and St. John, Mary and Martha, are reproduced in every generation, almost in every family. In our Lord, the active and the contemplative are so blended that it is impossible to say that either element predominates; the repose of contemplation on the mountain-side or in the upper chamber, is indistinguishably combined with energetic activity; in doing works of mercy, or in opposition to the powers of the world. Again, there are men whose idea of work is strictly confined to the aims and pursuits of public life, but who cannot easily bring themselves to take interest in individuals; while other excellent people can only work for individual men, and would seem to be incapable of more comprehensive views or efforts. In Him the two tendencies are perfectly harmonized. While His Arms and His Heart are open to all the peoples and races of the world, He yet receives one

[a] Luthardt, *Apol. Vorles.* ix.

by one the poor men and women who come to Him as if they were the only objects of His care; as He did her of Samaria,[a] or the Syrophenician,[b] or the family at Bethany,[c] or Zacchæus.[d] Again, with some men excellence appears to be so tranquil a development as to exclude the idea of their deliberately embracing it; with others, it involves so violent a wrench or struggle as apparently to forfeit the peace which is the crown of the highest goodness. In Him all is perfectly tranquil, yet all is the product of energetic Will. He wills perfectly every act, even the least, yet He never is carried away by impulse. He is always master of Himself, always acting as if expanding from within the unchangeable harmonies of His Being. Or consider Him with respect to the differences which part the character of a man from that of a woman? In Him, certainly, there was the sternest, most manly heroism, which defied the world; but there was also in its fulness the gentleness, the tenderness, the devotion of women; all that wealth of passive virtue which true women contribute to the common life of humanity. In the same way no race, no nation, could appropriate Him. Born in Judæa, He was no mere Jew, yet He was not, therefore, of Greek or Roman mould; and He belonged just as little to any sect or philosophy of the time, though all that was good in each was found in Him.[e] It would be easy to pursue the subject; but time forbids. He represents all, while He is above all. Not that the many-sided elements of His Humanity are so balanced as to present an indefinite and colourless whole. All in Him is vivid, fresh, distinct; yet all is so varied, that no excellence in our common nature is either excluded from or presented one-sidedly in this Living Type of its ideal

[a] St. John iv. 6–26. [b] St. Mark vii. 25–30. [c] St. John xi. 1–44.
[d] St. Luke xix. 1–10. [e] Goldwin Smith.

perfection. Thus we can understand that title which He so commonly gave Himself—"the Son of Man."[a] He did not mean merely that He claimed as applicable to Himself Daniel's great prophecy of Messiah coming in the clouds of Heaven;[b] He did not mean merely that He claimed to be truly a member of the race among which He tarried, and which He yearned to save. He meant that He was the Man of men; the central, the representative Man; the One Man in Whom humanity was not dishonoured, in Whom the Creator could behold it as He had meant it to be. In the same sense St. Paul calls Him the Second Adam.[c] As our first parent contained in himself the whole race of his descendants, so that they shared his shame and loss, because of their organic oneness with him as their ancestor; so Christ comes to be the Head of a new race of men, who by faith and love become united to Him, so as to share His merits, His moral wealth, His matchless glory. And precisely because He is not like any individual man, with special endowments and a striking idiosyncrasy, but, on the contrary, of a Humanity so universal and comprehensive that all feel they have a share in Him—and even Pilate, unconscious of the mighty truth He was uttering, could cry, "Behold the Man!"[d]—therefore He draws all men to Himself. He can sanctify all human capacities, He can subdue all human wills. The century in which and the people among whom He appears cannot monopolize Him; He and His Revelation have on them the mark of Eternity; He can bring all, who are not steeled against His advances by sin, into their right relation towards God and towards each other.

While we look steadily at this world-embracing power

[a] St. Matt. xii. 32; xiii. 41; xvi. 13, etc. [b] Dan. vii. 13.
[c] 1 Cor. xv. 45. [d] St. John xix. 5.

of His Humanity, we see the higher truth beyond. Who, then, was He, this Man of men, this Man Who stood towards all other men, by the mere facts of His Being, in so unique and unapproached a relationship? What was it that thus lifted Him above the loftiest heights of human excellence, and made His Life so full of meaning for the highest interests of our race? St. Paul must give the only answer that can be given in reason: "God sent forth from Himself His Son, made of a woman." As every human being has a human mother, these last words would be superfluous unless the Son of God were in Himself, in the root and seat of His Being, of a higher than human nature, which made His having a human mother of itself remarkable. God did not create; but, as the original word[a] means, God "sent forth" His Son, out of Himself; just as (it is the same word) He sent forth His Spirit, out of Himself. And His Son, thus sent forth into our world, was made of a woman. That was His link with our race. He had no human father; as we say in the Creed, "He was conceived of the Holy Ghost, and born of the Virgin Mary." But that link, while it made Him truly human, truly representative of the race of man, also left Him what He is in His Eternal Person. God's only begotten Son, though in the form of a servant,[b] is still Lord of all.

It is this mighty truth—the Incarnation of the Eternal Son—for which, on His Birthday, the Church of Christ is again about to offer its great yearly act of thanksgiving to God. Eighteen centuries and a half have passed since it happened; but, in presence of such an event, we think little of the lapse of time. And, in truth, the Son of God still wears, and will for ever wear that Human Nature which He took of His Virgin Mother. And therefore, whenever we say the Litany, we pray to our Lord Jesus

[a] ἐξαπέστειλεν. [b] Phil. ii. 7.

Christ, "By the mystery of Thy Holy Incarnation, by Thy Nativity, good Lord, deliver us." What is it from which the Incarnation can deliver us?

It delivers us from false views of the world and of life. It divides all history into two portions for the Christian thinker; into that which precedes, and that which follows it. It divides the human race at this moment into two portions; that which is within the Kingdom of the Incarnate Son, and that which is without. It divides the interests of life, of thought, of work, for a genuine Christian, into those which bear upon and advance God's work of Love in the Incarnation of His Son, and those which do not. When a man has once learnt what is meant by this stupendous event, the Incarnation of the Eternal Son, up to which all history leads, from which all true human interests ultimately will radiate, then life, work, the world, death, the future, wear another aspect.

And it delivers us from despairing views of human nature. We are often weighed down by a sense of weakness, of defilement, of distance from Heaven. Yet what must the worth, what the capacities, of this our nature be, when it has been retouched, regenerated by God? What may not be hoped for even from a nature of flesh and blood like ours, upon which the Eternal Son has put such high honour that He has robed Himself in it, that it might become to us a channel of sanctification and grace? This is the immense reality upon which the believing Christian falls back in hours of temptation or of despair; he calls to mind the charity of Him Who, when He was rich in the glories of Eternity, for our sakes became poor among the things of time, that we through His poverty might be rich.[a]

[a] 2 Cor. viii. 9.

Above all, if St. Paul were here, he would repeat His lesson to the Galatians, and remind us that the Incarnation of God the Son delivers us from bondage. He in whose heart the life of Christ beats, however intermittently, knows that by union with Him he is free; knows that he is not a slave, but a son, and that this filial freedom is a possession, of which every prayer, every act of sacrifice, every conquest of self, enhances the value. Oh! blessed Festival, in which faith and love have each so glorious a part; in which faith cries, in the words of St. Thomas, even at the Cradle of Jesus Christ, "My Lord and my God!"[a] in which love rejoices in the felt warmth of the Love of God, and resolves, by God's grace, to stand fast in the liberty with which the Incarnate Christ has made man free.[b]

[a] St. John xx. 28.

[b] Gal. v. 1.

SERMON XI.

BLESSINGS OF CHRIST'S FIRST COMING.

I. AN IDEAL OF LIFE.

(SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT.)

ST. LUKE I. 78, 79.

The Dayspring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.

IT will be my endeavour, my brethren, to-day, and on the three following Sundays, if God wills, to induce you to consider different sides of one single truth; namely, the blessing conferred on us men by our Lord Jesus Christ's First Coming into this our world. Such a subject is sufficiently in harmony with the Church's mind and purpose during the present month. She begins it by looking forward to the Advent as if, for the moment, she were living over again the expectations and hopes of bygone centuries. She ends it by thankfully commemorating the Advent on and after the Birthday of our Lord. Where there is so much to be said, we can only fix our attention on a few salient points. But the time will not be lost if we endeavour to do what is open to us, with a simple desire to understand and carry away as much

positive truth as we can; and, still more, if we follow up this effort by a resolution to give a practical expression to our knowledge as quickly and as forcibly as may be.

I.

Let me begin by asking a simple question. What is the need felt by all or most human beings in their higher moments? It will not do to reply, To be saved; because the fact, the nature, the need of salvation imply a great deal of knowledge and faith which may be altogether wanting. The answer is, To become better. Doubtless, there are some who never do feel this want; but, for my part, I believe that they are comparatively few. In all lives there are times when a ray of sunlight falls from Heaven upon what is called in the text "the shadow of death" which generally enshrouds them, and it quickens a yearning for better things. Doubtless, if you were to cross-question the average men and women whom you meet in the street, they might say that, for the moment, at any rate, to be quite frank, they wanted something else much more urgently. They are very poor; and they say that what they want most is money, or the means of livelihood. Or they are in bad health; and they say that, amid sleepless nights, and with a sense of weariness, and weakness, and uselessness, and the dull monotony of continuous pain, and, it may be, the sense of a gradual breaking up, no blessing seems to them so desirable as a restoration to health. Or they are in the midst of domestic troubles; somebody has gone hopelessly wrong, or there is a great family quarrel in which every one takes his side; and they say that the first essential for them is peace and comfort in the home circle. These are not, however, universal wants, because all human beings are

not in these particular circumstances. Nor are they really, if the truth could be known by those whom it most nearly concerns, the chief wants of those who are in such circumstances. Doubtless they look greater than other wants because, for the moment, they are pressing more than any other; just as a tree ten yards off looks taller and larger than a distant mountain. It will be said, perhaps, that happiness is as universal a want as moral improvement, and much more generally felt. But, then, what is it that ensures happiness? Nothing merely outward can do this; a man's happiness is not secured by his wealth or his honours. These things bring troubles and annoyances all their own, and their presence or absence no more touches the true springs of happiness than the colour of a man's coat affects the circulation of his blood or the regularity of his breathing, or than the wind which plays over the surface of the ocean troubles the depths below. Even such blessings as warm friends and an affectionate family, closely as they wind themselves around the heart, do not insure happiness; first, because they are transient, and our happiness is always disturbed by the apprehension of losing them; and next, because, in order to be made the most of, they must be relished by a certain moral appetite; the daintiest food is repulsive to a man who is hopelessly out of health. In short, happiness is essentially an inward thing; it cannot be inflicted or conferred from without; and it consists, so far as we can see, first, in the repose of an open heart on a really adequate and worthy object, and, secondly, in the due harmony of the several faculties of the soul. Until the heart is at rest, until the several powers of man's inward life are harmoniously adjusted, true happiness is impossible. But, then, what is this repose of the heart, what is this harmony of the faculties, but the fruit and

evidence of our becoming better, of our increase in goodness? Thus we come back to this point; that, after all, the general desire to be happy is, when it is rationally interpreted, a general desire to become better, although all noble hearts will feel that, if there were no such thing as happiness, goodness would be still worth any efforts on its own account.

II.

Now, in order to become better, we need, first of all, an ideal; a true outline present to our minds of what human goodness is. Do not let us think that this requirement is fanciful, and that we can, if we like, get on very well without it. All workmen, whatever they may be doing, must know what they are going to try to do before they begin to work. This is, we know, the case in art. The painter makes a sketch of his idea, in outline, upon paper, before he touches his canvas. The architect completes his drawings and models, before he begins to work at the foundations of his edifice. The poet tries to forecast, at least, in his mind, the probable direction and true limits of his song, before he essays to submit his thought to the restraints of verse and rhyme. In some cases, an accepted ideal may be discovered to be imperfect, and to require modification. A general, for instance, may find that circumstances oblige him to alter fundamentally the original plan of his campaign. But, speaking generally, the rule holds good, that in order to work well we must have an ideal of work before us; we must know at the outset what we mean to try to do. And this applies just as much to our becoming better as to other things. We must know what the improvement is to be at which we are aiming; we must have a standard of true excellence before our eyes, as a guide and as a stimulant.

Ah! there are persons who tell us that to confess our need of an ideal is to do a wrong to man's true dignity; that it is essential to our position as lords of the creation that we should look up to nothing higher than ourselves. Certainly, if this be true, man pays very dear for his dignity as a lord of the creation. For if any one law of creaturely existence is certain it is this, that improvement depends on struggling towards a higher existence than our own. Depend upon it, an ideal of some sort we must have; it is a necessity of our being; and if it be not above us, it will be beneath us. And since, in proportion to his force of purpose, a man's desires and affections follow hard upon his main currents of sincere thought, it follows that, when the ideal is below him, the whole character will gradually sink, as it will rise insensibly when the ideal is above him. This is no new doctrine. Our Lord said, nineteen centuries ago, "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."[a]

My brethren, if there is one species of human being of whom we might almost despair, it is a boy or a young man who has no enthusiasms for any person, or character, or cause; who is buried in his self-complacency, and thinks it part of his excellence to admire nothing, or, at least, to profess that he admires nothing. There may be foolish enthusiasms, misdirected enthusiasms, enthusiasms which lead people into error, or which condemn them to cruel disappointment. But to have no enthusiasms for anything beyond and higher than self, is nothing less than ruin; because it is the forfeiture, at the very outset of life, of a prime condition of real improvement. We all of us, young and old, need an ideal.

Probably there are some who hear me, who can confirm the value of an ideal of goodness from their own ex-

[a] St. Matt. vi. 21.

perience. Early in life, it may be, while principles were unsettled, and affections were fresh, and habits still unformed, and the will and character still open to receiving a decisive impulse in this direction or in that; early in life, when that most fatal of all scepticisms, a disbelief in any human disinterestedness, had not yet, like an early spring frost, settled down upon the soul to nip, with relentless activity, all its budding promise and beauty—we passed under the influence of some friend or relation, to whom we could look up with sincere affection and respect. A great character, tender and yet strong, many-sided and yet capable of intensity, laid its spell upon us; we had something to admire, to believe in, to attempt to imitate. It may well be that, in that life which to us seemed so nearly perfect, there were stains and flaws, as it lay out beneath the all-seeing Eye of the All-holy; but as yet, in those early days, we had neither the experience of sanctity nor the experience of sin which enabled us to trace them. And so we were lifted, for the time, out of the reach of lower aims and attractions; out of the influence of perilous companionships; out of the dead level of our self-complacency. And this strong and beautiful life has left us with an impression which lasts. It has passed away now, perhaps, many years ago; but the effects remain. We have known the happiness and the advantage of an ideal of human goodness.

Man needs, however, a perfect ideal, an ideal that shall permanently defy criticism, a sample of what human goodness is in its truth and completeness. Man is sure that there is such a thing somewhere. How should there be so universal an aspiration towards that which has no existence in fact? But if the question had been asked, at any time or place in the world's history between the death of our first Parent and the Birth of Christ, where

such an ideal life could be found, what must have been the answer? Over the whole ancient world we trace the Apostolic inscription, "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God."[a] The great characters in the literature of pagan antiquity are like the beautiful fragments of pagan art; they suggest perfection without reaching it; they are always mutilated, even when there is in them nothing positively hideous or degrading; the best among them fail to satisfy the craving of the human conscience for some life that shall show what man was meant to be. Socrates has been named as a heathen parallel to our Lord Jesus Christ; as a fearless apostle of truth in an age of unrealities and superstitions. But Socrates, not to dwell on graver faults, has so little of Apostolic consistency, that, after exposing popular superstitions all his life, he desires with his dying breath that a cock may be sacrificed to Æsculapius. Cicero was undoubtedly one of the purest and noblest characters in the public life of ancient Rome; a man who tried, with great sincerity of purpose, to wring perfection out of the philosophy which he had at hand. Yet Cicero's vanity is so egregious that, at this distance of time, it is almost impossible to read his letters and speeches without smiling. Seneca has still, as he always has had, his enthusiastic admirers. His writings represent the best effort of the pagan conscience, even if he did not get something from a higher source. But a subtle vein of pride runs through him, and spoils everything; and Seneca in practice is not Seneca on paper. He is, we must admit, cowardly and avaricious. Nor is it otherwise with the Saints of Israel. Israel had a Divine rule of human life, but no perfect living ideal. Israel's greatest and holiest—whether lawgiver, or prophet, or monarch—had each and all a share of imperfection. It

[a] Rom. iii. 23.

seems unfilial, ungrateful, to insist on the shortcomings of the Saints, but Scripture does record them. Noah,[a] Abraham,[b] Moses,[c] Samuel,[d] David,[e] Elijah,[f] Hezekiah,[g] fell short of the Perfect Will of God. David especially, the man who loved God and goodness with enthusiastic love, the man after God's own heart,[h] was so far from perfect that to us he is rather the model of penitence than of saintliness, of recovery than of perseverance. These great servants of God were, in fact, types of One greater than themselves; of One Who would collect in His single Person their several scattered excellences, while He rose above their characteristic failures; of One from Whom some rays of glory might seem to have fallen by anticipation upon these moral chiefs of the ancient people, that the eyes of men might be trained to gaze at Him when at last He came.

III.

Our Lord Jesus Christ satisfies this want of an ideal. He shows us what human goodness was meant to be. He offers us in His Life the ideal life, the life of man at his best, in his perfection. This is one meaning of the title by which, more frequently than any other, He referred to Himself—the Son of Man.[i] No doubt, the original purpose of His publicly taking that name, was to claim that He fulfilled the great prophecy in which Daniel describes One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven to the Ancient of Days, and receiving dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and

[a] Gen. ix. 20, 21. [b] *Ib.* xx. 2. [c] Numb. xx. 7–12.
[d] 1 Sam. viii. 1–3. [e] 2 Sam. xi. 2–25; xxiv. 1–10.
[f] 1 Kings xix. 4–14. [g] 2 Kings xx. 12–18. [h] 1 Sam. xiii. 14.
[i] St. Matt. xvi. 13, 27; xvii. 22; xviii. 11, etc.

languages should serve Him.[a] In our Lord's days this prophecy was one of the most familiar to the Jewish people, and they understood it to refer to the expected Messiah; so that when our Lord spoke of Himself as the Son of Man they understood Him to claim to be Messiah in the most solemn manner. Still, the question may be asked why Messiah should be called by such a title as this. It seems to be scarcely sufficient to reply, Because He was to be truly human, unless we bear in mind that He was more than man, so that His Humanity could not be taken for granted, and is, from the point of view of Revelation, somewhat of a surprise; just as it would cause surprise to describe a powerful king as poor, or a great general as a confirmed invalid. But a fuller and more satisfactory reason is to be found in the fact that our Lord is not merely human, but the Representative or Ideal Man; the one Son of our race Who is not unworthy of its origin, in Whom its idea is perfectly realized. This is what St. Paul means by calling Him the Second Adam,[b] the counterpart of the first father of our race. Unlike the first Adam, He is always true to the idea of a perfect humanity; and so He stands alone, as the first of a new race of men, as the faultless Pattern and Type of human goodness.

In this Ideal presented to us by our Lord's Life, observe, first, the absence of any disturbing flaw. In the midst of a soiled and sinful world, He alone is absolutely sinless. He, too, is tempted, as was Adam; but, unlike Adam, He resists temptation.[c] We shall seek in vain for any trace of evil in that Perfect Life, for any word, any action, any gesture or movement, which implies a will averted from good, which implies sin. Everywhere we

[a] Dan. vii. 13, 14. [b] 1 Cor. xv. 45. [c] Heb. iv. 15; St. Matt. iv. 1–11.

see in Him simple and sustained elevation above the circumstances, above the opinions of the world, above its pleasures and its sorrows. "In vain," it has been said, by no very friendly writer, "does the most keen-witted malice seek to trace selfishness in the motives of His actions." No lower inclinations of sense, no paltering with truth, no swerving from justice, no self-seeking, no covetousness, no ambition, can find a place in a Character of such lofty purity, such stern veracity, such considerate equity, such unreserved self-sacrifice, such disinterested love. Men have mistaken His anger against the buyers and sellers in the Temple[a] for an outburst of earthly passion; forgetting what a just and holy zeal for God's honour, which they do not feel themselves, might make imperative. Or they have excepted against the cursing the barren fig tree;[b] not seeing that for the Holy the material world is subservient to the moral, and that this act was designed to represent the approaching condemnation of impenitent Israel. Or they have imagined that the choice of Judas[c] betrayed a want of that higher insight into character which might be expected in a pure soul; here, too, mistaking merciful long-suffering for mere moral insensibility. Not that our Lord's sinlessness rests only on our inability to trace moral evil in any of His words or acts. His forerunner, John the Baptist, confesses[d] it; His Apostles insist upon it; for them He is the Lamb without spot and blemish, "Who did no sin, neither was guile found in His Mouth."[e] The judge who condemns Him washes his hands,[f] to cleanse them, if he might, from the stain of innocent blood; the centurion beneath the cross,[g] Judas in his despair,[h] unite

[a] St. John ii. 13–17.
[b] St. Matt. xxi. 19, 20.
[c] *Ib.* x. 4; St. John xiii. 21–26.
[d] St. John i. 26, 27, 29.
[e] 1 St. Pet. ii. 22.
[f] St. Matt. xxvii. 24.
[g] St. Mark xv. 39.
[h] St. Matt. xxvii. 4.

with the holiest souls in their acknowledgment of the stainless purity of Jesus. Nay, He Himself speaks as a sinless man. He calls men to repent, without once implying that He, too, is a sinner needing reconciliation and pardon in order to face the Purity and Justice of God. He teaches men to pray, "Forgive us our trespasses;"[a] but no prayer for the pardon of sin ever passes His lips. He goes further; He challenges His contemporaries to convince Him of sin if they could.[b] For any man whose character was not obviously spotless, such a question would mean either consummate hypocrisy, or self-deceit ranging to the verge of folly; but in our Lord it harmonizes perfectly with everything that we read about Him. The human conscience in all ages, like the conscience of His contemporaries, listens to that astounding question in reverent silence, and whispers to itself, "He has a right to ask it; for He, He Alone, is sinless."

Next, the Ideal of goodness presented to us by our Lord's Life is perfectly harmonious. We see in Him none of the narrowness or onesidedness which is traceable more or less in all great men. As a rule, a man can only appropriate one department of goodness at the cost of the rest. How often are the best people we meet with, charitable, but indifferent to the claims of truth; or truth-loving, but careless about the requirements of charity! In our Lord there is no one predominating virtue which throws others into the shade; every excellence is adjusted, balanced, illustrated by other excellences. It is impossible to maintain, with any show of reason, that some one particular temperament shapes His acts and words; that He is sanguine, or choleric, or melancholy, or phlegmatic. He is each of these and none of them.

[a] St. Luke xi. 4. [b] St. John viii. 46.

He combines the masculine with the feminine type; He combines the active instincts with the repose of contemplation. It is impossible to say that He surrenders Himself to any one aspect of duty to the neglect of others. He obeys the Law, but He proclaims man's moral freedom in obeying it. He rivals the sternest ascetics, in not having where to lay His Head;[a] yet He converses brightly with all the world, eats with publicans and sinners,[b] attends a wedding-banquet,[c] shed tears at a funeral.[d] He is eaten up, as He says, by zeal;[e] yet He is always calm; He rebukes the ill-considerate fervour which would call down fire from Heaven upon those who do not receive Him.[f] He is ever contemplating the nothingness of all created things,[g] and the Day which cometh as a thief in the night;[h] yet He sympathizes with all that is tender and beautiful in Nature; He points to the buds;[i] He lingers over the colours of the lilies;[j] He culls from the homeliest features and incidents of rural life the materials for those imperishable parables,[k] which, like flowers on the Altar, by reason of their very simplicity, are so suggestive of the Divine and Eternal Truths. He is tender without false sentiment; benevolent without a trace of weakness; resolute, but without passion, without obstinacy. His tender condescension never degenerates into mere familiarity; His incomparable dignity never touches—it were blasphemy to think it—the confines of pride; His lofty freedom from the world's tyranny and prejudices never becomes contempt for mankind, or any form of misanthropy; His implacable hostility to sin is always allied to the warmest love for sinners. Against

[a] St. Matt. viii. 20.
[b] *Ib.* ix. 10–13.
[c] St. John ii. 1–11.
[d] *Ib.* xi. 35.
[e] *Ib.* ii. 16, 17.
[f] St. Luke ix. 54, 55.
[g] *Ib.* xii. 15–26.
[h] *Ib.* 39, 40.
[i] St. Mark xiii. 28.
[j] St. Matt. vi. 28, 29.
[k] *Ib.* xiii. 1–43.

evil in all its forms He displays, not peace, but a sword;[a] while on those who will, He bestows the peace which the world cannot give.[b] In His own words, He is as wise as the serpent, as harmless as the dove.[c] He is in His Character, as by the terms of His Mediatorial Office, the Lamb led forth to sacrifice,[d] yet withal the Lion of the tribe of Judah.[e]

Once more, the goodness presented to us in the Life of Jesus is of a strictly universal type. It is flavoured, so to speak, by no race, no clime, or sect; it is absolutely world-wide. Certainly, the broad features of goodness are always the same; but a good Englishman is in many ways a figure with a different outline from a good Frenchman or German. National habits, and modes of thought and action, drape the eternal virtues in dissimilar guises; and—such is our finiteness—a very French type of goodness would not find many imitators here, just as a good Englishman would require to be studied by our neighbours across the Channel before they could do him justice. Now, although our Lord was born in a province of the Roman Empire marked by the very strongest peculiarities of race and thought, He does not exclusively belong to it. His character is just as intelligible to the Greek or the Roman or the Teuton, as to the Syrian or the Arab. No Jewish sect can claim Him as its adherent; no Jewish teacher has left on Him a narrowing impress; no popular errors among the people of whom He came receive any sanction at His Hands. He will not hear of their superstitions about sabbath-observances; He is Lord also of the sabbath.[f] He will not sanction their cruel intolerance of the Samaritans;[g] the Samaritans, both in

[a] St. Matt. x. 34. [b] St. John xiv. 27. [c] St. Matt. x. 16. [d] Isa. liii. 7. [e] Rev. v. 5. [f] St. Mark ii. 23–28. [g] St. Luke ix. 51–56.

His teaching[a] and in fact,[b] are objects of His special favour. They may judge hardly of the Galilæans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with the sacrifices, or of the eighteen whom the tower of Siloam had crushed in its fall, or of the man born blind; but He will not for a moment yield to their assumption that each form of bodily misfortune is the consequence of some secret sin;[c] He has a wider and wiser philosophy of pain than that. Still less has any Roman or Greek or Indian teacher shaped Him into an intellectual mould; He rises above all the dividing lines of that or any previous or subsequent age; He speaks to the human soul in all countries and ages, with the authority of One in Whom every soul finds its ideal Representative. Although He wore the dress of a Jewish Rabbi, and accommodated Himself to the usages of Jewish life, all His ordinary words and actions, although altogether suitable to His age and country, are yet also equally adapted to all peoples and all time. And thus His Character is correspondent to His world-wide claims; men in all quarters of the world have recognized in Him the absolutely Universal Type of human goodness; and if Christian saints have dared to say with His great Apostle, "Be ye followers of me," they have quickly added, "even as I also am of Christ."[d]

There is, indeed, one feature of our Lord's bearing towards men, His boundless claims upon their faith and obedience, which would be fatal to the ideal presented to us, if it did not proceed from a necessity of His Being, as One higher than any of the sons of men. As it is, His self-assertion is part of His perfect veracity. He would not have been true to Himself or to us, if He had shrunk from claiming to be the Judge of the world;[e] to be

[a] St. Luke x. 33–37. [b] St. John iv. 1–26, 39, 40.
[c] St. Luke xiii. 1–5; St. John ix. 1–3. [d] 1 Cor. xi. 1.
[e] St. John v. 22, 27.

already One with the Everlasting Father,[a] in distant ages when Abraham, the Patriarch of Israel, had not yet been born.[b]

But into this we must not enter further to-day;—there are two observations to be made in conclusion.

1. If our Lord is thus the Pattern Man, the four Holy Gospels are, on this account alone, the most precious of all books. They are the inner Sanctuary of Scripture; its Holy of Holies. Certainly, the Eternal Spirit moves and breathes everywhere in the Sacred Volume; but His organs are very various. Elsewhere we are in presence of legislators, historians, Prophets, Apostles; here we must listen to the Divine Master. The same Figure, so gracious yet so awful, is presented in four distinct, yet harmonious types of narrative. Like those four mysterious Beings whom Ezekiel and the beloved disciple successively beheld in vision,[c] highest and nearest to the Throne of the Uncreated, as representing the loftiest forms of created life, so do the Four Evangelists stand alone, even in the Book of God, because they narrate the Life of the Perfect Moral Being, Our Lord Jesus Christ. Just as those "rest not day and night, singing, Holy, holy, holy,"[d] so have these but one aim in their work; they would show us their Lord and Master. In their incomparable pages, we miss much that we should find in a human biography; no circumstances are dwelt on as illustrating greatness, no attempts are made to draw attention to the beauties of Character; the writers evidently feel that, in such a Presence, comments or panegyric would be out of place, and irreverent. The narrative flows on in the

[a] St. John x. 30.
[b] *Ib.* viii. 58.
[c] Ezek. i. 5–14; Rev. iv. 6–9.
[d] Rev. iv. 8.

simplest and most unlaboured style; and we feel that a Being is before us, Whose words and deeds reveal at once a matchless simplicity and an awful dignity, as He speaks and acts. One work there is, the product of the highest Christian genius, *The Imitation of Christ*—whether by à Kempis or an unknown author, I cannot determine—which more than any other has caught the spirit of the Evangelists; but their sublimities, like jewels lying among the pebbles on a sea-beach, are revealed to quick eyes and earnest hearts. The Perfect Life they record is the first Blessing of the Advent; let us remember it practically during the next three weeks.

2. If Our Lord be thus the Pattern or Ideal Man, we must love Him. Not merely for what He has done for us —of which more hereafter—but because He is what He is; "One fairer than the children of men."[a] This love, I say, is no mystic reverie, no rare spiritual accomplishment; but a moral necessity. For what is it that provokes human love? Always and everywhere beauty; whether beauty of form, or beauty of thought, or beauty of character. And as there is a coarse and false beauty which commands the passion of degraded love, so should a true and pure beauty provoke the purest and strongest affections of a spiritual being. Therefore St. Paul says, "Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity."[b] Therefore he says, "If any man love not our Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maran-atha."[c] The love of the One Perfect Man is a true criterion or test of our actual state; we shall certainly love Him if we are looking upwards, if we are trying, however imperfectly, to be like Him. And this love of Him is the first condition of our becoming better. With this consummate

[a] Ps. xlv. 3. [b] Eph. vi. 24. [c] 1 Cor. xvi. 22.

Ideal of human Perfection before our eyes, our whole nature will rise to a higher level, keeping pace with the upward movement of our hearts.

May He, the Day-star from on High, visit our hearts by His Spirit this Advent, banish their darkness and their gloom by the Revelation of His Beauty, and then, enfolding us in His Love, guide our feet across all intervening obstacles into the way of Eternal Peace.

SERMON XII.

BLESSINGS OF CHRIST'S FIRST COMING.

II. ILLUMINATION.

(THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT.)

ST. LUKE I. 78, 79.

The Dayspring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.

THE coming of our Lord Jesus Christ into this our world was considered last Sunday afternoon as settling for us men a primary and very important question, namely, what human life at its best was meant to be like. For us Christians that is no longer an open question. Our Lord Jesus Christ has offered us an Ideal of life which authoritatively closes it. The local and national drapery which, so to speak, encircles Him, does not obscure the world-wide significance of His Life and Character; the accidents of His coming as a Jew, eighteen centuries ago, are easily translated into their equivalents at other times and places; and there remains an Ideal. It is the Ideal of a Manhood which, by its perfection, disarms the most fastidious criticism; by its majesty awes irreverence at

least into respect; by its tenderness takes millions of hearts, age after age, so altogether captive, that they are constrained to lavish on it the best of their love and their adoration. But side by side with man's desire to find the moral ideal of his life, in view of which he may become better, is a wider anxiety to understand, if he can, the secret and object of his existence. While our moral instincts, making the most of that original sense of right and wrong which is a part of every soul's outfit, are tracking their way towards an Ideal Life, our intelligence is at work all the while on a larger circle of ideas, and is constantly raising or encountering questions which cannot but present themselves. My brethren, there are times in the lives of most thoughtful men when the primary questions recur to us with a kind of awful freshness, starting up, as it were, out of the quiet routine life which we are leading, and troubling the depths of our being with their searching importunity. Whence am I? What am I? Whither am I going? Man's real nature, his origin, his destiny,—these are questions which cannot be treated as if they belonged to the mental department which most of us label "Notes and Queries." They are obviously questions of the first importance; questions compared with which the literary and social and political trifles with which we amuse ourselves during the greater part of our brief life here dwindle away into their proper insignificance. Do not say, "These are only speculative questions; we can do our duty very well while we leave them unanswered." They may, in themselves, belong to speculative rather than to practical truth; but they have immediate and important bearings upon practice. We need not spend time and trouble in satisfying ourselves that the whole idea of the meaning and solemnity of life and duty depends upon the answer we do give to them; that

to know that we are really imperishable beings, with an endless destiny of some kind before us, receiving from One above us the gift of life, and having to account for the use we make of it, is for serious persons a most fruitful piece of knowledge; while denial or doubt of it is proportionately impoverishing and disastrous. All such questions really run up into one. Does any Being exist, Who explains to each of us the mystery of his own existence; a Being to Whom we owe it that we are here at all; Who upholds us in existence moment by moment; Whom we are bound to serve now; and in Whose Presence, hereafter, we shall find our perfect Satisfaction and Reward?

Now, St. Paul tells us that in Nature and in conscience, taken together, man has materials at hand for learning that God exists; and by God he means, not a mere stupendous force, nor yet merely an all-surveying intelligence, but, over and above this, a moral Being. "That," he says, "which may be known of God is manifest in the Gentile nations; for God Himself hath showed it unto them. Since from the creation of the world His invisible attributes may be clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His Eternal Power and Godhead; so that," he concludes, "these Gentiles are without excuse, if they do not act upon this knowledge."[a] And what Nature teaches from without, conscience teaches from within. "The heathen nations," says St. Paul again, "having not the Law" which was once given to Israel, "are a law unto themselves;" since they "show the work of the law," of that conduct which God requires, "written in their hearts," as for Israel, it was written on tables of stone, "their conscience also bearing witness to it."[b] Thus, conscience within man, as Nature without him,

[a] Rom. i. 19–21. [b] *Ib.* ii. 14, 15.

points to God, even without a Revelation. The facts of Nature suggest an Author; the law of conscience implies a Lawgiver; and that the Lawgiver of conscience is also the Author of Nature, is, on the whole, a presumption so probable, that man may be held responsible for presuming it, even when he is without Revelation. But its certainty is attested by miracle; the weapon, so to speak, with which Revelation makes its way, and one object of which is to show that the material world is under the control of the Lord of the moral world.

Here observe, my brethren, that St. Paul is speaking of what man *may* know by the aid of Nature and conscience; but whether he will do so or not in a given age or country, depends upon whether he will or will not make the most of his resources. As a matter of fact, he has, more frequently than not, closed his eyes to this gift of natural light. Unwilling to know more of the Lawgiver of a conscience which he disobeys, he has disregarded the teaching both of conscience and of Nature. Hence the various idolatrous and Polytheistic systems of the pagan world; hence "the gods many, and lords many."[a] These systems do not represent man's struggle upwards, from an utter darkness towards the recognition of one God, but, on the contrary, they represent stages of his descent from a knowledge or suspicion of that primary truth towards pure fetichism. "When they knew God, they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. . . . And they changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image like unto corruptible man, and unto birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things."[b] Indeed, if we wish to study this process of the gradual decomposition of a faith, we need not go back to the pagan religions of

[a] 1 Cor. viii. 5. [b] Rom. i. 21, 23.

the ancient world. The last number of a popular and brilliant Review may possibly enough show us how, with a higher than any natural light flooding all intelligences that have eyes to see, men even yet shut their eyes to all spiritual truth whatever, and so bury themselves in the folds of matter that Nature becomes to them, instead of the robe of beauty which everywhere speaks of the Monarch Who wears it, only a thick veil that hides Him from the sight of His reasonable creatures. But even when this is not the case; even when God is believed to exist; the questions involved in our relations towards Him are still unsolved. Why did He place us here? Does He take notice and care of us? Shall we know or see anything of Him by-and-by? Shall we exist in any practical sense after death? To these questions even Theists can answer only hesitatingly, Perhaps. If we are to know anything certainly, God, Who sees the secret of our destiny, must Himself speak to us.

I.

"Behold, darkness hath covered the earth, and thick darkness the people: but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and His glory shall be seen upon thee."[a] If there is a Good God in existence, Who has made us, His creatures, such as we are, with these wants, these capacities, these aspirations, these hopes, these presentiments, these fears, then it is highly improbable that He should not show us something more of Himself and His Will than can be learnt from Nature and conscience. Nature has its dark patches of unintelligible pain and ruin; conscience has its moods of vacillation and bewilderment. A clearer, stronger, steadier light is needed to guide man along his

[a] Isa. lx. 2.

path to a future Home. A clear Word of God, spoken to man; that is what is wanted. And it is unimaginable to those who believe Him to be Loving and Wise that He should allow His creatures, century after century, to grope after Him unavailingly, when it would cost Him so little to speak. This sense of a great probability that God would speak, meets the evidence that He has done so half-way, and is designed to do so.

And here it may be well to notice an old, but by no means extinct, objection to the very form and instrument of Revelation as "the Word of God," spoken to man, and uttered or written down by man as God's Word. We are gravely told that for a spiritual Being like God to speak is an anomaly; since speech, a movement in the air resulting from the vocal organs, implies an animal organism; and, accordingly, the phrase and idea of a "Word of God" is only one of those many ways of degrading the conception of Deity for which the Christian Revelation is held responsible.

It is better to treat this anxiety for God's honour, wherever we find it, as sincere; though it shows itself too often, in certain quarters, only when some point of Christian doctrine has to be discredited. As God's Justice and Generosity are pleaded against the Atonement; as the gifts of sacramental grace are said to materialize the idea of His spiritual influence; so, in like manner, to suppose that He can speak, is described as changing Him into the image of His animal creatures. What, then, is this idea of the Word of God which the objection presupposes? It is, I reply, a purely physical idea of it. So much organic activity, so much atmospheric vibration, such and such an impression upon the nerves and the brain; that is a word. This implies that by a word is meant only a regulated sound; that sound is the essential thing

in it; that, apart from sound, it does not exist. Whereas, in reality, sound is the mere physical dress of the word; whether of the word of man or the Word of God. The substance of the word, of which sound is the clothing, is thought; thought equipped for transmission from one thinking spiritual being to another. No doubt, with us men—composite beings as we are, with souls clothed in bodily forms—our ideas take a physical and outward dress too, in order to be transmitted from one being to another. But is no communication, then, possible between one disembodied spirit and another? And if it is possible, is it to be supposed that such communication passes in an uttered language? Are we sure that no beings communicate with us excepting through the organs of sense? Is it certain that the strange, unaccountable thoughts, good and evil, which present themselves to our intelligence, are not imported by other beings; whether angels, or evil spirits, or the spirits of the departed? In short, if by the expression, "the word," be meant "thought ready for transfer to another mind," whether through the medium of language or without it, who shall deny that one spiritual existence may speak to another, or pour into another, by a sympathetic contact of which we can form only dim imaginings, a tide of thought, and feeling, and passion, and resolve—a vast body of spiritual power for good and evil; and that a created spirit may receive in turn a reciprocal influence for evil or for good? And if this be so, who shall say that the One Self-existing Spirit alone may not speak; that while every creature has its appropriate language, its voice,[a] as St. Paul says, whether articulate or not, God alone shall not communicate His Will to created and dependent minds; that while beneath His throne there is an

[a] 1 Cor. xiv. 10.

incessant activity of intercommunication between beings of all orders of intelligence, He alone, the Maker of all, the Lord of all, is condemned to silence, banishment, isolation, in order, forsooth, to guard His dignity?

"No, no," it is said by another group of disputants; "we do not mean that. Of course the Infinite Spirit can speak to other spirits if He chooses; and we, for our parts, believe that He has spoken, and still speaks, to all. Our objection to the Christian idea of Revelation is that it is too limited; that it confines to a few agents, and to a single age, a process which we maintain to be as ancient and as universal as humanity. God has always been revealing Himself; and Christianity can no more monopolize the privilege of being the one Revelation than England can claim to be the one country on which the sun shines."

Here, brethren, let us admit what must be cheerfully admitted; namely, that God has not left Himself without witness[a] anywhere among men; that, as we have seen, He has provided Nature and conscience as means which, if they are made the most of, enable men to attain to a certain knowledge of Himself. If, enlarging the idea of Revelation, you choose to call that primary lesson of Nature and conscience Revelation—do as you please; only let us understand each other. Of course, in that sense, all the false religions in the world contain an element of Revelation; just enough to prevent their forfeiting at once all claims on the affections and thoughts of men. But if by Revelation we are to understand, as is usually understood, only such truths about the Nature and Will of God as Nature and Conscience could not enable us to reach, then I say, advisedly, that Revelation is a monopoly of Christianity. For Revelation has two

[a] Acts xiv. 17.

concurring certificates of its reality. One is a miracle, whereby the Revealing God, the Lord of Nature, steps, as it were, from behind the veil, and gives a sensible proof that He is in communication with the human agent who claims to be uttering His Word. And the other is conscience, the seat of His original Presence and legislation; but now illuminated by a higher truth than heretofore, and recognizing this illumination as in harmony with its first and earliest lessons. Thus our Lord appealed both to His Works[a] and to the inward light[b] or eye in His hearers, when urging His claims. Other religions have produced miracles, true or false, while conscience has been drugged or perverted; or they have roused conscience into sympathy or dissatisfaction, but without being able to show that any being beyond the veil of sense sanctioned their appeal. The Gospel has combined the two; the best attested miracles with the most searching appeals to conscience. The seed thus sown in honest and good hearts has brought forth "some an hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty."[c]

II.

Much, indeed, had been done within the limits of Israel to satisfy man's desire to know more of God than could be learnt from Nature and conscience. The history of Israel is a history of successive Revelations. First came the great Lawgiver, with his moral, religious, and civil institutes, with the Divine Law recorded, independently of the memory and conscience of Israel—as we should say, objectively—upon tables of stone; and then a long line of teachers, rulers, leaders, saints, prophets—

[a] St. John x. 25–38. [b] St. Luke xi. 34–36.
[c] *Ib.* viii. 15; St. Matt. xiii. 23.

but especially of prophets—each adding something to the sacred deposit, each illuminating some more or less obscure portion of the Will of God; completing the outline of some prediction, or reinforcing some moral truth, or rebuking some sin or error, or removing some barrier between the heart of Israel and its unseen King. As we are told in the Epistle to the Hebrews, God spoke His Will in many fragments and in many modes.[a] It is a wonderful procession moving across the centuries—that of the organs of Revelation in ancient Israel;—that long array of minds to which God whispered various portions of His Will, so that each of them, as an Apostle says, "spake as he was moved by the Holy Ghost."[b] But this Revelation did not satisfy man's needs. It was confined to a single race; whereas the need was as wide as humanity.

Moreover, although the Jewish Revelation taught all that Christianity teaches as to man's origin, and his continuous dependence upon God, its disclosures as to the life beyond the grave, and the means of attaining the end of our existence, were partial and unsatisfying. It was, in fact, introductory to another and a fuller Revelation, as its proper climax and explanation; a Revelation of which the Revealer Himself would be the central Object. "God, Who in sundry parts and in divers manners spake in time past unto the Fathers by the Prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son."[c]

"His Son!" Let us dwell on that prerogative Name. It must mean a Being Who shares the Father's Nature, yet is personally distinct; the One Being Who, by nature and right, stands towards the Eternal in this unique relationship. But lest we should think of some inferior

[a] Heb. i. 1. [b] 2 St. Pet. i. 21. [c] Heb. *ubi sup.*

and created nature, Scripture gives the Son another name; He is called "the Word;" that is, the Thought or Reason, uttered or unuttered, of the Everlasting Father. What is more intimately a part of a man than his thought? What more clearly distinct from him, while yet inheriting his nature, than his child? Thus Scripture teaches us the existence of One Who is of one substance with the Father, yet personally distinct from Him; His Peer and His Companion from everlasting. "In the beginning," says St. John, "was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."[a] Our human nature is a poor attenuated likeness of the Perfect, Uncreated Being; fatherly affection among men is a shadow of the Divine Fatherhood of God; filial dependence among men is a shadow of the Eternal Sonship within the Godhead. And in like manner, since the human soul has, as part of its outfit, thought, tending always to communicate itself through language—imperfect, hesitating, transient, though it be—this thought is an earthly shadow of Him, the Personal Thought or Word of God, Eternal as God is Eternal, sharing His Power, His Wisdom, His Goodness.

Well, my hearers, here is the first truth of the Christian Creed. The Eternal Word, or Son of God, took flesh in Jesus of Nazareth. "The Word was made Flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory."[b] Jesus was not a mere man, more highly illuminated by the Divine Spirit than His predecessors had been. He was in the seat and root of His Being the personal Son or Word of God, clothed in a human Body and Soul which He had made His own. And this it is which constitutes the specialty of His Revelation. When Jesus spoke, it was the Eternal Thought or Word of God That spoke. He spoke not through another person, but directly, through

[a] St. John i. 1. [b] *Ib.* 14.

His own human organs and speech, to those whom His words reached. "That Which was from the beginning," says an Apostle, "Which we have seen with our eyes, Which we have looked upon, Which our hands have handled, of the Word of Life; (for the Life was manifested and we have seen It, and declare unto you that Eternal Life, Which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;) That Which we have seen and heard declare we unto you." [a]

What, you ask, is the certificate of this? The answer is, again, miracle and conscience. First, His Resurrection. "He was powerfully declared," says St. Paul, "to be the Son of God, so far as His Holy Higher Nature was concerned, by His Resurrection from the dead." [b] He had Himself appealed to this proof of the truth of what He said about Himself. If the Jews would destroy the temple of His Body, He would raise It again in three days.[c] If they wanted a "sign" in His favour, the Prophet Jonas might suggest one; the Son of Man would be buried, not in the whale's belly, but in the heart of the earth, and would then rise to life.[d] His Resurrection is a matter of historical fact, only to be set aside by *à priori* assumptions of its impossibility; and as it covers, so to speak, all His other miracles, so its evidence is reinforced by the higher conscience of our Lord's contemporaries. "Never man spake like this Man;" [e] that was the feeling of those who listened for a moment without prejudice. "The people were astonished at His doctrine: for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the Scribes;" [f] that is the Evangelist's report of the impression produced by the Sermon on the Mount.

[a] 1 St. John i. 1–3. [b] Rom. i. 4. [c] St. John ii. 19.
[d] St. Matt. xii. 38–40. [e] St. John vii. 46. [f] St. Matt. vii. 28, 29.

III.

They did not trace the deepest cause of this astonishment; but our knowledge is illustrated by their experience. That which struck the people was His possession of authority; a threefold authority, as it would seem; the authority of certain knowledge, the authority of entire fearlessness, the authority of disinterested love.

The authority of certain knowledge. The Scribes argued, conjectured, balanced this interpretation against that, this tradition against the other. They were often learned and laborious. But they dealt with religion as antiquarians might deal with old ruins or old manuscripts, so that when it reached the people, the underlying elements of truth were overlaid with a mass of doubtful disputation, of which none could seize the precise value. When, then, our Lord spoke with clear directness, as One Who saw spiritual truth, and took the exact measure of the unseen world, and described without any ambiguities what He saw, the effect was so fresh and unlooked for as to create the astonishment which St. Matthew describes. Doubtless the prophets would have contrasted advantageously with the Scribes of our Lord's day in this respect; but there is an accent of authoritative certainty in our Lord which no prophet assumes, when he corrects error or unveils truth. "It hath been said by them of old time," He says again and again; and then adds, "But I say unto you."[n] His authority supersedes all who had gone before; and He knows it. Compare Him with St. Paul. St. Paul, no doubt, announces truth authoritatively; but St. Paul is a dialectician who writes long argumentative letters to his converts, and who preaches argumentative

[n] St. Matt. v. 21, 22; 27, 28; 33, 34; 38, 39; 43, 44.

sermons in the Jewish synagogues. St. John more nearly resembles, but, then, he more closely repeats, His Master. Jesus, with His "Verily, verily, I say unto you," is the most authoritative Teacher, pouring forth a flood of light upon all the great problems of human interest; on the reality of the Divine Providence, on the destiny of the human soul, on the secret miseries and the true consolations of human life, on the means of access to the Father. He is conscious of His own place in the history of religion. As He says, "Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see: for I tell you, that many prophets and kings have desired to see the things that ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear the things that ye hear, and have not heard them;" [a] so He says, "The Queen of the South came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a Greater than Solomon is here." [b]

Observe in Him, too, the authority of entire fearlessness. In all ages, this kind of authority has been comparatively rare. Many a man will occasionally say strong and paradoxical things, who is by no means consistently fearless. If he fears not the world, or his declared opponents, he fears his friends, his supporters, his patrons; he fears them too much to risk their good will by telling them unwelcome truth. To fear no man, high or low, educated or untaught, rich or poor; to draw a clear line of distinction between love and honour on the one hand, and fear on the other; to do justice to the element of truth which underlies all error, and yet to make no compromise with the substance of the error itself; to offer no incense to mere prejudice and passion; to refuse to suppress, or to enwrap in lifeless and unmeaning generalities, unpopular

[a] St. Luke x. 23, 24. [b] St. Matt. xii. 42.

but certain truth; to set aside, if need be, the weight of custom, and the influence of powerful personages or classes, while saying frankly, strongly, boldly, what is known to be true; and yet to be considerate and moderate; moderate with the self-restraint of conscious fearlessness and clear-sightedness, and not from the feeble timidity which fears lest any one enunciation of absolute truth should give offence,—this, my brethren, is easier to describe than to realize, God knows. The Scribes failed here; they were largely dependent on the people, and, like ministers of truth in purely voluntary systems elsewhere, they deferred largely to the superstitions and prejudices of their patrons. Prophets, indeed, such as Elijah,[a] Isaiah,[b] Jeremiah,[c] Daniel,[d] and last, not least, the Baptist,[e] had really risen above this temptation. But the First Apostle yielded at Antioch to wrong-headed but affectionate followers, who would have brought back Jewish observances into the Christian Church.[f] Here, as elsewhere, our Lord is above them all. Look at the Sermon on the Mount; in which the most comfortable glosses upon the old awful Law of Sinai are sternly exposed and set aside; in which the exigency of its spirit, as distinct from the easy obedience to its literal requirements, is insisted on;[g] in which, as afterwards in those discourses reported by St. John, the great authority of the most powerful classes in Jerusalem is confronted with an uncompromising determination. Read the twenty-fourth chapter of St. Matthew, or the end of the ninth chapter of St. Mark, and say if this language would have been spoken by teachers who were balancing the claims of truth against the chances of success.

[a] 1 Kings xxi. 20–24. [b] Isa. xxxix. 3–8. [c] Jer. xxi. 11–14; xxii.
[d] Dan. iv. 19–27; v. 17–29. [e] St. Matt. xiv. 3, 4.
[f] Gal. ii. 11–16. [g] St. Matt. v. 21–28.

Most human teachers wait till they are backed by numbers, till their words are the echo of a multitude. Jesus enunciates truth as depending on its internal strength, harmony, necessity; as itself mightier than the errors, prejudices, passions of the place and hour; as being no mere passing or local influence, like opinion, but unchanging and eternal, dear to God, and, whether in the martyrdom or triumphs of its representatives, holding from Him a charter of ultimate victory. With Him, it could not have been otherwise; but with Him, as with the lowliest of His servants, it was an element of great authority.

Note, above all, in our Lord Jesus Christ the authority of pure and disinterested love. Here, too, as a class, the Scribes were wanting. To them religious teaching was not a labour of love, but a means of livelihood. They were more like lecturers upon an ancient religious literature than envoys from, and exponents of, the Heart of God. And this is true of the great teachers of the pagan world in a much greater degree. A philosopher made the best he could of his clever guess; he had nothing to do with love. He would have been ashamed of any exhibition of tenderness; he was supposed to be above the joys and sorrows of ordinary men. Even the great Jewish prophets, standing in some respects between the Law and the Gospel, were in this less like the Gospel than the Law. Hosea comes nearest to that yearning for man's highest good which is so characteristic of our Lord; but Hosea cannot compare with the Divine tenderness which sheds tears over Jerusalem,[a] or which welcomes and pardons the Magdalen.[b] Especially do we miss in the prophets that practical love of individual souls which is so conspicuous

[a] St. Luke xix. 41. [b] *Ib.* vii. 37–50.

in our Lord Jesus Christ. While His horizon of activity and aim is infinitely greater than theirs; while He is gazing steadily upon a vast future of which they had, by comparison, only dim and imperfect presentiments; He devotes Himself—we may dare to say so—to a publican,[a] to a Syrophenician stranger,[b] to a Nicodemus,[c] to a Samaritan woman,[d] to the family at Bethany,[e] as if, for the time being, there were none others in the world to engage His care. Nowhere, perhaps, is this aspect of His teaching so prominent as in His Last Discourse in the Supper-room;[f] the language of the Uncreated Love speaking directly to human hearts in words which, at the distance of eighteen centuries, retain this the secret of their matchless authority. It was with this accent of certainty, this fearlessness, this love, that our Lord Jesus Christ deposited His Revelation within the souls of men. True, He did not state many formal propositions; He was oftener engaged in quickening consciences than in instructing minds. But in the fulness of His authority, in addition to what He taught Himself, He sanctioned the teaching of bygone centuries, and of His Apostles after Him. "Not one jot nor one tittle," He said, looking backward, "shall pass from the Law, till all be fulfilled."[g] "When the Spirit of Truth," He said, looking forward, "is come, He shall guide you into all truth."[h]

And thus from Prophets, from Apostles, above all, from Himself, we now know, or may know, all that is most important for us, as men, to know. As Tertullian said in his day, our little Christian children can answer the questions which are in debate among the philosophers.

[a] St. Luke v. 27–32. [b] St. Mark vii. 25–30. [c] St. John iii. 1–13.
[d] *Ib.* iv. 1–26. [e] *Ib.* xi. 1–44. [f] *Ib.* xiii.–xvii.
[g] St. Matt. v. 18. [h] St. John xvi. 13.

We know Who created this wonderful Universe, with its mysteries of teeming life. We know Who placed us here, and why He has placed us here, and how we may fulfil His high purposes about us. We know what is behind us, before us, above us; God our Creator, God our King and Ruler, God the last End of our being. We know, too—marvellous is His love to have committed such knowledge to such puny intelligences—we know something of the eternal harmonies of His Uncreated Life; of the mystery of a Threefold Subsistence within the Divine Unity; of the unutterable condescension of Him Who has brought us this knowledge; of the Divine Spirit Who continually recommends it to our inmost souls. We have before us, or rather we have in our possession, a body of fixed, unchanging truth, in outward form like the opinions and philosophies which make up the staple of human thought, but, on a closer inspection, both in its substance and in the authority on which it rests, utterly distinct from them. "The Dayspring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, and to guide our feet into the way of peace."

My brethren, if Jesus Christ, the Eternal Word, has indeed at His first coming brought us from Heaven this gift of revealed truth in its fulness, He has thereby imposed upon us peculiar responsibilities. He does not force it upon our understandings. We can elude its loving pressure, if we will, by indifference as well as by ingenuity. But, plainly, it cannot leave us, in any case, as we should have been had it never been given at all. In a Christian country like this, we have all of us more or less distinctly stood face to face with it. We have all had our opportunities — when and what God knows — for becoming acquainted with its claims. "If," said our Lord, with

mournful solemnity, of the men of His day—"if I had not come and spoken unto them they had not had sin; but now they have no cloke for their sin."[a] Such knowledge is, or may be, an unspeakable blessing. But such knowledge may be also, for those who set it aside, or make no use of it, the measure of their loss. Which, dear brethren, is it to be for you and me? The years within which this question has to be answered cannot be long for any of us. The issues which depend on our decision are final for us all.

[a] St. John xv. 22.

SERMON XIII.

BLESSINGS OF CHRIST'S FIRST COMING.

III. REDEMPTION FROM SIN.

(FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT.)

ST. LUKE I. 78, 79.

The Dayspring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.

IN considering our Lord first as the Model and then as the Enlightener of mankind, we have been making our way towards a third aspect of His Work which His Advent suggests. He is also our Deliverer from the guilt and the consequences of sin. Had He only shown us what man was meant to be, He would have left us with the painful conviction that we are, one and all, in different ways, very unlike the intended Model. Had He added to this a knowledge of our destiny beyond the grave, and pointed out its direct connection with our actual state in this life, He would have heightened our misery without doing anything substantially to alleviate it. A revelation of moral beauty in a world of sinners, followed by a revelation of the consequences of sin, would have been like the torch-light visit of a high-spirited and inquisitive traveller to the scene of a battle-field, when

night had separated the combatants. The ground is stained with the disfigured bodies of the dying and the dead; the air is filled with the moans of the despairing sufferers; but the traveller can only bring his torches to light up the scene in all its horrors for those who are still able to take the measure of their misery; he can only remind them, by his own bright appearance, of all that they have, perhaps irretrievably, lost. He is not a surgeon, or a hospital nurse; so he goes on his way, and night spreads its shroud over the scene of pain. But as he disappears into the darkness he is followed—well, he is not followed by the blessings of the sufferers.

I.

If our Lord's Advent into the world could have recalled this description, He would have neglected the main source of human discomfort and apprehension, and indeed the cause of those other needs which have already been considered. For why has man ever lost the true ideal of his life? Why does he ever shiver at the possibilities which surround his destiny? The answer is that he is aware, more or less dimly, of the presence of a fatal flaw in his nature, of a power which has entered into it, and put it out of harmony with itself and with the true law of its action. The shadow of a great failure has fallen upon the human family, and so individual men, even before they begin to act for themselves, feel, as do persons born out of wedlock, that they lie under a disadvantage at starting which they have inherited. As was said by a clever wit of the inhabitants of modern Rome, some fifteen years ago, mankind in a natural state is born to "an inheritance of ruins."[a] Ruins in the

[a] E. About.

intelligence, which preserves fragments of truths that it once contemplated in their perfection; ruins in the affections, which, instead of rising to Heaven, constantly busy themselves in seeking treasures beneath the soil of earth; ruins in the will, which has lost its original force and directness, and too often is the slave of the passions which it was meant to curb. This is what is called the doctrine—it might just as well be called the fact—of the Fall. If the real nature and extent of the Fall has been mischievously exaggerated in certain quarters of Christendom; if fallen man has been represented as morally so impotent that he is practically irresponsible; such exaggerations must not blind us to the truth which they distort. The Fall of man is a fact which can be ascertained by observation. It is to be observed especially in man's difficulty in mastering what he knows to be good—the better pagans were fully alive to the difficulty of virtue;—in his facility of lapsing into what he knows to be evil; in his indisposition to rise out of himself heavenward; in his secret enmity to the thought of a Holy God; in his natural dislike and suspicion of his brother-man, apart from the ties of blood or of self-interest; in the wild disorders of his own inner being; in the degradation of his soul, meant to command his body, to be its slave and, I may say, its victim. "Behold, I was shapen in wickedness; and in sin hath my mother conceived me."[a] That is the language of every child of man who attentively studies the facts of human nature. Predisposition to sin is as universal, it is all but as old, as humanity; and though at times the fact may seem to be obscured by anomalous outbreaks of generosity or courage, it is soon reasserted. There was a depressing conviction of this truth in the

[a] Ps. li. 5.

ancient world, which expressed itself in a story that has often been quoted to illustrate it. Hercules, the representative hero of pagan faith, may reach what seems to be the climax of glory, as the conqueror of monsters and tyrants, and the generous friend of the weak and the distressed; but, as he wraps around his frame the fatal garment which a woman has offered him, he finds that he is the prey of a devouring flame, and the hands which were all-powerful against tyrant-force are powerless to strip off the robe of Deianira.

How has man succeeded to this inheritance of weakness and sin? God did not make us as we are. He made our first parent a sinless being; He added to his stock of natural powers, instincts, aspirations, an endowment of grace, which, while it did not force him to be loyal to God, made loyalty easy. Still, God willed to be served by a freely yielded service; and His gifts to Adam did not destroy Adam's liberty. Adam was free to try the experiment of evil, if he chose; and, with his eyes open, he tried it. We know the sequel. By that one act he entered upon a life under totally new conditions. Sin, which had before required an effort, became easy; virtue, which had been natural to him, became difficult and unwelcome. And what he had become, that his children became; he left them his nature, his fallen nature; with all its traces of a splendid past, with all its actual and humiliating disabilities. He could not leave them what he had lost; the robe of righteousness now lay inside the gates of Eden. If he transmitted his nature at all, he could not but leave them an entail of weakness and corruption; an inheritance of moral death. "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin." [a]

[a] Rom. v. 12.

This doctrine of the transmitted effects of the Fall is constantly urged against Christianity, as a tenet inconsistent with the Justice of God. At any rate, my hearers, we do not escape the presumed difficulty by rejecting this particular doctrine; since the same feature of the Divine government meets us again and again elsewhere. Take the not unfrequent case of a parent who fatally impairs his constitution by habits of intemperance or debauchery, and then transmits to children and grandchildren a weakly type of existence; condemning them by anticipation to an unusual share of disease and pain. The argument against original sin on the score of its injustice, would impeach the Divine Creator for not having summarily prevented the debauched father from becoming a parent; why does God not cut him off by death, when it must have been foreseen that he would only add to the sum of human misery? Or look at the moral disadvantages which are entailed upon children by irreligious or immoral parents. These children have no choice as to where they will be brought up, or as to whether they will exist at all; such questions are settled for them. Yet their first lessons are lessons of vice, of blasphemy, of dishonesty, of all that will make their future a future of utter misery, unless some one interfere. Of such children there are thousands in this metropolis. And it may be urged, with as much reason as before, that Divine Justice ought to forbid the existence of children in such circumstances as these; but then, as a matter of fact, God does nothing of the kind. Again, many a man has been born into the world with good abilities, ample means, a desire to make himself as useful as he can to his fellow-creatures, and yet his life has from the first been overshadowed by some act of his father's, against the social effects of which he struggles in vain. Why should God

give so much that promises future usefulness, and then allow all to be ruined by an entail of real or supposed dishonour? Louis XVI., as everybody knows, went to the scaffold in consequence of the errors of a dynasty of which he was the most virtuous member. And we Englishmen of to-day pay taxes in order to defray the expenses of wars carried on by our grandfathers and great-grandfathers, but for which we are as little answerable as for the campaigns of Julius Cæsar. In short, whether we look to man's physical nature, or to his moral and spiritual education, or to the structure of human society, we see everywhere the same dependence of one generation of men upon another, in the most vital respects; and, accordingly, the objection to original sin which we are considering is in reality little less than an impeachment of the general scheme of God's government of the world. True, He does break through the fatal entail in conspicuous instances. The Jews of the Captivity thought it hard that they should be suffering for the sins of bygone generations, and complained that "the fathers had eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth were set on edge;"[a] and Ezekiel was told to assure them that, in their instance, every man would bear his own burden;[b] the entail of punishment was to end. But the rule still holds good as part of God's general government. God still deals with us men as families, as nations, as parts of the entire organism of humanity, no less than as individuals. Clearly, in the last resort He has a right, as Creator, to do this. And if He does so, His action tells both ways; it is the principle of the restoration of man as well as of his fall. As Adam's sin involves in its fatal consequences the natural family of man; so Christ, the Restorer, acts and suffers on behalf of the whole redeemed

[a] Ezek. xviii. 2. [b] *Ib.* 3, 4.

family.[a] If God sees fallen man in our first parent, He welcomes restored man in our Second. St. Paul balances the results and exclaims, "If sin hath abounded, grace hath much more abounded."[b]

II.

We must not, however, anticipate. Let us observe next that, over and above this transmitted inheritance of a sinful disposition, there is the immeasurable mass of actual sins, of which all human beings are guilty; of which every man and woman adds so many to the existing stock. We are so familiar with the name and the fact of sin; it so clings to our whole life of thought, speech, and action; that we think as little about it as of the weeds which grow in a country lane. But it is not the less serious a matter for all that. Let us ask ourselves, before we go further, What do we mean by sin? The question is a practical one for all of us.

Do we mean by sin, thoughts, or words, or acts, or habits which fall short of being good? Do we mean merely imperfect goodness, so that the contrast between a thief and an honest man is only a contrast between the more honest man and the less? This has been maintained by able writers; but it is in contradiction to the sense of the human race. Sin, all the world over, means something resolved or done in opposition to good, not merely failure to attain it.

Do we mean by sin, a necessary step or stage in the development of a moral being; a counterpart to those diseases which, although painful and weakening at the time, are said to purify the blood and strengthen the

[a] Rom. v. 12–19. [b] *Ib.* 20.

constitution? This, too, has been maintained by a philosophical school; but the common sense or judgment of men rejects it. When we name "sin," we do not mean a useful factor in the progress of man or of society, but some thought or word or deed which our sense of right condemns as that which ought not to be, whatever may or may not come of it.

Do we, then, mean by sin animalized human life, consisting in the sovereignty of the senses of man over his reason? Doubtless a great deal of sin takes this form. But there are spiritual sins with which the senses have nothing whatever to do, such as pride, envy, and the like. The form of sin is one thing, the essence another. And the essence must be something common to sins which take a sensual form, and to sins which have nothing to do with the senses.

Is this essence of sin, then, contradiction to received human opinion? The other day, a clever, off-hand writer said that the only satisfactory standard of conduct was obedience to the opinion or the law of a man's country. According to this, sin would be contradiction of national opinion or national law. National opinion may, no doubt, support that moral truth which sin contradicts; it proscribes theft or murder, and to commit murder or theft is to sin. But national opinion varies at different times and in different countries; it permits many sinful things in England; it enjoins many sinful things, as Christians consider them, say in China and India. A varying standard of right and wrong like this cannot possibly have that sacredness which makes an offence against it sin; and this holds good of national law as well. Human law, indeed, wherever it is not opposed to the Law of God, is sanctioned by God's authority as being law, and in that sense to break it is to sin. But human law may, for

instance, sanction the re-marriage of divorced persons, in which case it sanctions that which our Lord Jesus Christ expressly condemns;[a] or it may bid Daniel "fall down and worship the graven image which Nebuchadnezzar the king has set up."[b] In that case, disobedience to human law is so far from being sinful, that obedience would be sinful; a higher than any human law has a first claim on obedience. Although, therefore, a great many persons have no better idea of right and wrong than that which is supplied by the law of their country and the opinion of their contemporaries, it is clear that these authorities supply a standard too uncertain, too self-contradicting, too equivocal, to enable us to describe all offences against it by so solemn a word as "sin."

We are not losing our time, my brethren, in reviewing these misconceptions. They still enjoy, in different degrees, a certain vitality. And, until we know what sin really is, we have no adequate idea of our own misery, and therefore no adequate sense of what has been done for us in order to relieve it.

Once more, then. What do we mean by sin? We mean intentional contradiction, in thought, word, or act, of the perfectly Holy Will of God, by the free will of His intelligent creatures. Why should contradiction of God's Will be of so grave a character as the word "sin" always implies? Because God's Will as to all matters of moral truth expresses a necessity of His Nature. God is not good because He chooses to be good, as though it were open to Him to be something else. We may dare to say that, being God, He cannot help being good, and willing goodness; He would cease to be Himself could He be otherwise. We may see this, if we reflect that the laws of goodness are just as eternal and necessary as the laws of

[a] St. Matt. v. 32. [b] Dan. iii. 5.

mathematics. As it was always true that things equal to the same are equal to one another, so it was always true that veracity is good and falsehood evil. Our minds refuse, in either case, to conceive a time or circumstances in which falsehood could have been good; in order to suppose it, the texture and constitution of our minds must be destroyed, just as it must be destroyed, if we are to suppose that there was a time when things equal to the same were unequal to one another. But if the laws of goodness are as eternal as the axioms of mathematics, they must have existed thus eternally, either in independence of the Eternal God, or as a part of His Nature. To suppose that they existed independently of Him is to suppose that He is not the Alone Eternal; in other words, that He is not God. And therefore we are driven to conclude that, just as pure mathematical truth expresses facts of the Divine Nature in ways which we shall possibly comprehend hereafter, so moral truths are integral parts of that Nature, and God prescribes truthfulness, justice, purity, and the like, not capriciously and as a matter of taste, but because He is what He is, the All-holy. This enables us to see the real character of sin. It is a contradiction of that which God wills respecting the conduct of us His creatures; not of that which He chooses to will, as men have spoken, but of that which He wills by virtue of His Nature as the necessarily Holy Being. Sin contradicts God's Nature; it is in conflict with His Existence; it would, if it could be indefinitely exaggerated, destroy Him; and it is the dim perception of this awful truth which gives the word so much deeper a sense, in the customary speech of men, than is to be wrung out of those shallow explanations just now glanced at. The original Biblical words for sin imply this without saying it. According to one, by sin man passes the line which

separates good from evil;[a] according to another, he falls from one state of existence down to a perfectly different state;[b] according to a third, he misses by it the true aim of his existence.[c] This will enable us to see that sin cannot but have consequences. It is not like a mood of thought or feeling which arises in the mind, and leaves no appreciable traces of its presence. It introduces a new state of things, which continues until it is reversed by some act as definite as the act which introduced it. Of these consequences, some are within the soul, and some are without it. Of those within the soul, the gravest consequence is the collapse of the higher spiritual life which sin poisons. If the sinner is a Christian, he forfeits grace; "that grace wherein we stand,"[d] as St. Paul puts it. If a heathen, he forfeits partially or wholly his hold on the natural moral truth which God has taught him. The symptoms may be more or less pronounced, but there is no mistake as to their general character. The man's spiritual senses are benumbed, paralyzed. He sees not any realities beyond sense; he hears not any voices which speak only to conscience; he has no taste for the good things which God has prepared for the spiritual palate; his will is enchained. "Whosoever committeth sin is the slave of sin."[e] But he cannot altogether rid himself of regret that he has done what he has. "A certain fearful looking for of judgment"[f] haunts from time to time the secret recesses of his soul, and he is wretched. He is always liable to these recurrent tortures; and there are times when the past rises up against him like breakers rolling one after another upon a perishing wreck; times

[a] *παράβασις*, Rom. v. 14; Gal. iii. 19.
[b] *παράπτωμα*, Rom. v. 15–18; 2 Cor. v. 19.
[c] *ἁμαρτία*, Rom. v. 12, etc.; iii. 9; vi. 1, etc.
[d] Rom. v. 2. [e] St. John viii. 34. [f] Heb. x. 27.

when, as with Richard III. on the eve of Bosworth Field, all the ghosts of past crimes present themselves with terrible vividness.

> "My conscience hath a thousand several tongues,
> And every tongue brings in a several tale,
> And every tale condemns me for a villain.
> . . . . . .
> All several sins, all used in each degree,
> Throng to the bar, crying all, Guilty! guilty!
> . . . . . .
> Methought the souls of all that I had murdered
> Came to my tent, and every one did threat
> To-morrow's vengeance on the head of Richard."[a]

And these consequences of sin, internal to the soul, are corresponding to other consequences altogether independent of it. Whether the sinner remembers his sin or not, the Infinite, All-surveying Mind cannot but know of it. Each sin is a spiritual fact, and no fact can be hidden from, or other than present to, the All-seeing Mind. And, noting it, He cannot but punish it. He would cease to be Himself if He could regard it with any approach to complacency or indulgence. Men sometimes use language as if sin were rather a sort of breach of the etiquette of the universe, than anything more serious; and as if God, like a good-natured earthly prince, might be trusted or expected to excuse that which could not really harm Him and only thwarted His personal inclinations. It is only when we remember that moral truth is God's very Nature that we understand the necessity which He is under of punishing that which contradicts it. Justice is the reverse side of goodness: if God could indulge sin, He would not be good. And, let us note, no mere rules of conduct for the future, however excellent, will help us here. The Gentiles had such a rule in natural morality;

[a] *Richard III.*, Act v. Sc. 3.

but, as St. Paul shows, it only availed to condemn them, for falling below and contradicting natural morality.[a] The Jews had such a rule in the Law of Sinai; but, as St. Paul shows, it only condemned them still more emphatically, in proportion to its greater explicitness, as conspicuous breakers of that Law which was their national boast.[b] "By the Law," says St. Paul, "is the knowledge of sin;"[c] "I had not known sin, but by the Law."[d] That is the measure of a rule of conduct, even though it be Divine. It does not do away with the guilt of past transgression. It does not confer any strength which will make obedience easy in the future. By itself it only illuminates the past; in proportion to its clearness and authority, it forces us to look beyond itself for relief. This is what St. Paul meant by that famous sentence of his, "The Law is our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ."[e]

For the Revelation of a moral God is a Revelation, not merely of Justice, which belongs to the truthfulness of goodness, but also of Mercy, which belongs to its active enterprise. If God hates sin which He did not make, He loves sinners whom He did make. He hateth nothing that He has made.[f] Degraded though it be, He does not despise the work of His own Hands.[g] The sinner is a rebellious child, but he is a child; his body and his soul are alike precious; they are masterpieces of wisdom and of love. God sees beneath the ruins caused by sin the buried remains of past magnificence; He sees the outline of a likeness which once was accurate, and which is still dear to a Father's eye. Thus the Divine Mercy yearns over the sinner, while the Divine Justice condemns him. The Jews knew this truth as we know it. As we sang

[a] Rom. ii. 14–16. [b] *Ib.* 17–23. [c] *Ib.* iii. 20.
[d] *Ib.* vii. 7. [e] Gal. iii. 24. [f] Wisd. xi. 24.
[g] Ps. cxxxviii. 8.

this morning in that magnificent Psalm, composed in the first bright days after the return from Babylon—

"The Lord is full of compassion and mercy,
Long-suffering, and of great goodness.
He will not alway be chiding,
Neither keepeth He His anger for ever.
He hath not dealt with us after our sins,
Nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.
For look how high the heaven is in comparison of the earth;
So great is His mercy also towards them that fear Him.
Look how wide also the east is from the west;
So far hath He set our sins from us." [a]

But, then, the question is, How is mercy to be something different from mere indulgence; how is it to be true to those requirements of goodness which comprise hatred of evil; how is the song of the Church, as the Psalmist has it, to be a song, not of mercy only, but of judgment too? [b]

III.

Here, then, we reach the third aspect of our Lord's coming into this human world. He comes, not merely to teach us how to live; not merely to lighten up the dark secrets of our existence and our destiny; but to take away our sins.

He is a Revelation both of Love and of Justice, and of the true term of their reconciliation in God. The old moral Law still holds, "The wages of sin is death." [c] But "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish." [d] For "He is," says His Apostle, "a Propitiation for our

[a] Ps. ciii. 8–12.
[b] *Ib.* ci. 1.
[c] Rom. vi. 23.
[d] St. John iii. 16.

sins; and not for our sins only, but also for the sins of the whole world."[a] And if it be asked, How can He possibly stand in this relationship towards man? the answer is a fourfold one.

In the first place, He was qualified for this work as being sinless; the one Sample in all history of entirely spotless manhood. "He did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth."[b] One stain would have impaired His capacity for pleading for mercy on a world of sinners. He is "the Lamb of God;" the Emblem of innocence as well as the Sacrificial Victim; and thus "He taketh away the sin of the world."[c] He is "made sin for us, Who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him."[d]

Next, He was equipped for this work by being the Representative Man. When He came among us, "He took not on Him," says His Apostle, "the nature of Angels; but He took on Him the seed of Abraham."[e] It was not a personal human being; it was human nature which the Son of God wrapped around His own Eternal Person, that it might be, not one among many, but the natural representative of all. In a former sermon[f] I have had occasion to dwell on our Lord's Representation of the race considered as furnishing a Model for true human life. We must now consider it as the basis of His Atoning Death. The principle of representation is universally admitted; parents act for their children, governments for a people, the elected for the electors, in all departments of human activity and life. There are certain conditions which make representation natural; some men are elected to

[a] 1 St. John ii. 2. [b] 1 St. Pet. ii. 22. [c] St. John i. 29.
[d] 2 Cor. v. 21. [e] Heb. ii. 16. [f] Cf. Serm. XI.

represent, others represent by their position, or by their birth, or by their age, such and such a number of their fellow-men. Jesus, as the One Perfect Sample of humankind, represented us all. The acts and words of His Life were representative; His active obedience is, if we will, ours; believing, purified, restored humanity acts and speaks in Jesus; and, before the Eternal Purity, all the new generations of men are "accepted in the Beloved."[a] And, conversely, He pays our debt to the Justice of God; He bears our sins, as our Representative, in His Own Body on the Tree;[b] and, as a consequence, "there is no condemnation to them which are *in* Christ Jesus;"[c] "for as in Adam," man's natural representative, "all die, even so in Christ," man's Spiritual Representative, "shall all" who have a part in Him "be made alive."[d]

He made Himself ready for this by offering Himself voluntarily to suffer. The notion of injustice as attaching to the Atonement proceeds upon the idea that Jesus was dragged against His Will to Calvary, just as the sacrificial beasts of the old covenant were driven to the altar. But He was offered because it was His own Will. "Sacrifice and offering Thou wouldest not, but a Body hast Thou prepared Me. . . . Then said I, Lo, I come to do Thy Will, O God."[e] As He said just before His Passion, "No man taketh My Life from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again."[f] Clearly, there is a vast difference between a victim whose life is wrung out of him, and a soldier who freely devotes himself to death. The soldier has a right to do this, for adequate reasons. Life is the noblest sacrifice which a free moral being can

[a] Eph. i. 6. [b] 1 St. Pet. ii. 24. [c] Rom. viii. 1.
[d] 1 Cor. xv. 22. [e] Heb. x. 5, 7. [f] St. John x. 18.

offer in the cause of truth or goodness. There is something to be said about injustice, when a slave is bidden risk his life for a cause with which he has no sympathy; but we have not yet learnt to think of injustice in connection, say, with the death of Regulus, or with the death of Bishop Patteson.

Fourthly, and above all, He could really undertake this momentous work because He is not only man, but more than man. We can conceive a mere man becoming, by a rare grace, the perfect model of humanity. We can conceive a mere man as so filled with Light from Heaven as to teach his fellows all the wisdom and secrets of this and the other life. But how should a mere man put away the sins of a guilty world? Here, surely, is some new power communicating to the acts and sufferings of the sinless Representative of our race, Who freely offers Himself on its behalf, a virtue which literally knows no bounds. Every human act is limited in its value; every human pang, however instinct with moral motive, finds at last a sphere where its power throbs away into silence. The value of the Death of Christ, extending itself, in His intention, as we know, to the whole human family, and to all the ages of the world, depends upon the fact that He is the Everlasting Son of God; and hence every act and every suffering of His is weighted with an infinite value; it has a force which is literally incalculable. Indeed, on the Cross, as in nature, we see the prodigality of God's Love. "In His love and in His pity He redeemed us."[a] It is not hyperbolical to say, with St. Augustine, that one drop of the Redeemer's Blood might have redeemed a thousand worlds; but God does nothing by halves, and in His love, as in His justice, far beyond

[a] Isa. lxiii. 9.

our notions of bargain and equivalence, there are depths past finding out.[a]

Here, then, on the eve of the Christmas Festival, we see the end, as it were, in the beginning; we see the flower in the germ; we see the most solemn significance of the Advent for a world of sinners. If our guilt has been put away; if we have been robed in white garments, and have not defiled them;[b] if we can look up to the Face of our Father in Heaven with filial confidence; if Angels see in us their destined fellow-citizens; if life is made bright to us by hope, even more than by resignation; if death has already lost his sting, and the grave its ancient victory;[c]—this is because the coming of our Lord into this human world has achieved for us redemption; redemption from sin, redemption from death, redemption from fear. Having been "justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."[d] We reach forth the hand of faith to receive a gift which we never could have earned; and He, in return, washes us from our sins in His own Blood,[e] and robes us in His righteousness.[f] How He does this; how He completes His work—we may consider more at length another Sunday. To-day let us reflect that to no one of us can such a gift be matter of indifference. If any are still sitting in moral darkness, in the shadow of an Eternal Death which already darkens life by anticipation, let them know that the Birth of Christ means the visit of the Day-star from on high; that it means the Birth of the Redeemer. They may yet find at His Hands, if they will, the fulness of pardon and of peace. And let those who have "washed their robes, and made them white in

[a] Rom. xi. 33. [b] Rev. iii. 4; xvi. 15. [c] 1 Cor. xv. 55–57.
[d] Rom. v. 1. [e] Rev. i. 5. [f] Isa. lxi. 10; 2 Cor. v. 21.

the Blood of the Lamb,"[a] remember that a redeemed life must be a practical preparation for taking part in that Song which saints, and only saints, will sing for ever before the Throne: "Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us unto God by Thy Blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation. . . . Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing."[b]

[a] Rev. vii. 14. [b] *Ib.* v. 9, 12.

SERMON XIV.

BLESSINGS OF CHRIST'S FIRST COMING.

IV. THE GIFT OF A NEW NATURE.

(SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS.)

ST. LUKE I. 78, 79.

The Dayspring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.

CHRISTMAS has come; the echoes of the great Festival are almost dying away; but we are still far from exhausting the subject on which we entered in the early days of Advent. It is a subject which belongs to Christmas as well as to Advent. If Advent is expectation, Christmas is enjoyment; if Christmas celebrates the Birth of the Son of God, Advent persistently looks forward to it. We are not out of order, then, in still proceeding to consider a result of Christ's coming for which the earlier stages of this inquiry will have prepared us. As our Model, He has taught us the true ideal of life. As our Instructor, He has taught us the secrets of our destiny. As our Redeemer, He has bought us out of the power of sin and death, and has made peace for us with God. But here a question occurs with painful

urgency. He has destroyed for us the guilty past; but will He help us in the future? Is His Gospel like a hospital which cures its patients of a deadly disorder, and then turns them out into streets and alleys which are hotbeds of infection and disease? Or has He provided for the future as well as for the past? Has He, besides curing us, furnished us with antidotes against the inroads of our old enemy? Is He really made to us, as His Apostle says, Sanctification as well as Redemption?[a] Deliverance from evil is always a blessing; but if there be no provision against the recurrence of evil, or if the enfranchised are placed in a position which they cannot really fill, deliverance is at best a very imperfect blessing. We see an illustration of this in the case of the negro population which was emancipated at the close of the civil war in America, ten years ago. Few Englishmen would dispute the wrongfulness of the slave-system, or the duty of emancipating slaves wherever it can be done. But, looking to some recent events, at New Orleans and elsewhere, it is surely impossible to deny that to confer the full rights of free citizenship upon a population which has none of the moral and social qualities that enable it to make use of them, is to confer on such a population a blessing which, however just, is of doubtful value. And the question before us to-day is whether our Lord's work for us is open to this sort of criticism; whether, besides ennobling us with the gift of freedom, He has furnished us with the means of doing justice to its high requirements.

I.

Reverting to one of the great truths with which we set out, let us remember that a first necessity of our moral

[a] 1 Cor. i. 30.

nature is to become better, and that our Lord's undertaking is to make men better; or, as His Apostle says, "to purify to Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works."[a] If, indeed, this were not the case, if the Gospel really contented itself with making men comfortable, instead of aiming at making them good, there would be a plain divorce between religion on the one side, and conscience on the other; a divorce which, in the event, would be fatal to both. Now, here we are encountered by a serious but indisputable fact; the weakness of human nature when thrown on its own resources. The sense of guilt, the dread of punishment, are removed by our Lord's expiatory work; but the collapse of strength remains, whether against the inroads of evil, or for purposes of energetic good. To man in his natural state, virtue is a difficulty, while vice is the order of the day. Vice means movement with the stream of fallen human nature; virtue movement against the stream. Virtue, as the derivation of the word suggests, means a serious effort; an act of force, whereby man detaches himself from the tyranny of passion, the tyranny of custom, the tyranny of opinion, the tyranny of surrounding circumstance, and makes head against it. My brethren, I put it to you whether this sense of the word is not justified at either extreme of society? Those who have read the recently published memoirs of the late Mr. Charles Greville,[b] will feel that the traditional sentiment of the upper orders is often hostile to anything that deserves the name of virtue. And those who know anything of the tyranny of vicious opinion in the darker haunts of London, know that real virtue in many a young man or woman among the poorer classes is a triumph of moral force, asserting itself against

[a] Tit. ii. 14.

[b] The first portion of the *Greville Memoirs* appeared in October, 1874.

obstacles and pressure of the most formidable kind, and at great risk to those who practise it. Joseph in the house of Potiphar, Daniel in the Court of Babylon, John the Baptist face to face with Herod and Herodias, represent trials that are reproduced in other ages and countries; and sometimes the tempted triumph as of old, but too often they fail. To resist threats, to resist seduction, to resolve that, come what may, the true shall be obeyed, the good shall be done, the evil shall be put away—this is not easy; when man is left to himself it is exceedingly difficult.

The fact which makes virtue difficult is that man, in his fallen estate, wants heart for it. Vice, it has been said, grows like thistles in a neglected garden. That garden is human nature, ruined by Adam, and as yet unblessed by Christ. Vice is at home in it. Vice does not need encouragement like virtue; vice gets on very well without rewards for proficiency. We are told sometimes by great authorities—not by any great religious authorities—that children are born good. Look at that charming baby, they say; look at his bursts of affection, his sweet smile, his innocent and irrepressible joy, his loveliness and beauty, and tell me if it is possible to believe those gloomy theologians who affirm that he is born in sin. Well, my brethren, in answer to that I will only say, don't christen him, don't instruct him; leave him to the guiding impulses of his sweet nature, and see what he will come to be. He will be, a few years hence, selfish, tyrannical, greedy, cruel; the terror first of his nurse and of his mother, then the aversion of his companions and of his schoolfellows, until at last, when grown up, he reaches the level of a possibly elegantly dressed and well-spoken savage; a savage, if he has the chance, in cruelty; and worse than any respectable savage, almost certainly, in debauchery. Society knows this quite well, even when

its leaders sneer at the Christian doctrine about human nature; and, accordingly, society, that is, a majority of us, tries to drill this charming and sinless infant into something like outward respectability by what it calls unsectarian or secular education. The child is whipped at regular intervals; taught reading, writing, arithmetic, geography, and history; taught that he has duties as well as rights; taught that he has superiors as well as equals and inferiors; taught that work has its claims as well as enjoyment; taught that he must give as well as take. And then he is turned out into the world of men; better, beyond all doubt, for this youthful drilling, so far as it goes; better, certainly, in a social and worldly sense. But his ruling motives are prudence and fear; and fear and prudence are not at all equal in the long-run to the requirements of virtue. They are too negative, too cold, too much engaged in calculations to storm the breach when the moment arrives for doing so; they are reflecting that evil is attended with practical inconvenience when they ought to be fired with a chivalrous passion for the beauty of goodness, and prepared to risk everything for her sake. However, the effort which society has made to drill the boy shows that the raw material of human nature is not really, in the deliberate and practical judgment of society, so altogether admirable as a modern statesman[a] is said to have pronounced it; and that there is room, or rather, necessity, for the Christian doctrine of an inward influence in order to make man what he was meant to be.

II.

Here the question arises whether such a force is not to be found in the great motives to goodness which faith in

[a] Lord Palmerston.

the Redemptive work of our Lord Jesus Christ so abundantly supplies. What can move a man, it may well be said, if the astonishing love of God, shown in the Incarnation and Death of His only begotten Son, does not move him? How are we to be led to act, except from conviction? How is the will to be roused and sustained, except through the intelligence? And does not the work of Christ our Lord, when clearly apprehended by the understanding, provide adequate materials for firing and invigorating the will?

Nothing, my brethren, could be further from my purpose than to depreciate the invigorating force of Christian motives. St. Paul has consecrated their power in a passage full of his characteristic intensity: "The love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if One died for all, then were all dead: and that He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him that died for them, and rose again."[a] Each act in our Lord's Redemptive Work, each labour of His Life, each separate humiliation and pang in His Passion, constitutes for the believing Christian a separate motive which operates, through the play of his intelligence and affections, with decisive force upon his will. "If He acted thus, what must I do? If He bore this and this for me, what should I do or bear for Him?" And yet, allowing all this, a motive by itself is not equal to what is wanted in order to keep the will up to the level of the Christian life. It tells with very unequal force upon minds of different orders. It upheaves the will into sudden activity, and then it dies away; the image upon the mind's eye becomes fainter, or more familiar, or less able to create active enthusiasm. The tendency of a natural force is to spend

[a] 2 Cor. v. 14, 15.

itself. Let any one of us compare the force which the example and words of a parent has upon his daily life one month after the parent's death, one year, five years, twenty years, forty years. At each of these periods the old love and grief and reverence can be rekindled, but the difference between the first and the last is, that in the first the motive is always present and powerful; in the last, it is present only at rare intervals, and is greatly weakened in its capacity for exciting or controlling the moral nature.

What is wanted, then, is something that will supplement this weakness of motive acting in a natural way. Certainly, no properly Christian motive can operate apart from the presence of a higher influence; for it must be apprehended by faith, and faith is impossible without a special assistance from on high. "No man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost."[a] But besides the apprehension of the motive, the process of assuring to it a lasting sway over the soul, is the work of a new influence which redresses the defects of nature by reinforcing it from above. And thus the Church teaches us to pray that God would give us a due sense of all His mercies, that we may show forth His praise, not with our lips only, but in our lives.[b] It might be thought at first that natural gratitude would secure this; as a matter of experience, we find that a new motive power, a distinct invigorating influence, is required.

Revealed religion undertakes to supply this influence, which is called "grace." What do we mean by "grace"? In the first instance, the word means "favour," and, when man is its source, it need mean nothing beyond. You or I may very well entertain favour towards a fellow-man, and yet do nothing for him; we reach the kindly feeling, and then we stop. We may fail to do more through

[a] 1 Cor. xii. 3. [b] General Thanksgiving.

want of means, or want of determination; our feeling is strong enough to exist as feeling, but not strong enough to act. This failure, which is so familiar to us, and is part of the finiteness and imperfection of our being, is impossible with God. The Perfect Being cannot thus halt between a moral premise and its practical conclusion. If God entertains favour towards a creature, then He blesses that creature; the grace of God means, not a passing mood of feeling in the Divine Being, but a substantial gift. The characteristic of this gift, as implied by the word "grace," is that it is unmerited by the receiver. And since all that He gives us in nature as well as for our redemption is undeserved, the term "grace" is sometimes applied to "our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life," and more frequently to outward aids which enable men to live for God; such as the knowledge of His Will, the teaching of His Son, the preaching of the Gospel, the examples of good men. The Pelagians, who tried their best, sixteen centuries ago, to discredit that part of Divine Revelation which we are now considering, applied the term "grace" to these external blessings; but they refused to it its proper sense of an inward force acting on the soul. Grace, in the true sense of the word, is an unseen influence which touches man within; it inspires him with good thoughts, pure desires, pious resolutions. When the Bible speaks of God's turning the hearts of men, changing them, opening them, strengthening them, this language means God's unseen action upon the soul; and this action is exerted partly upon the understanding, darkened by the Fall, and partly upon the will, weakened by the Fall. We pray for one form of grace in the Collect for to-day,[a] when we ask God to cast the bright beams of

[a] Feast of St. John the Evangelist.

His light upon His Church. We pray for the other in the Collect for the Last Sunday after Trinity, when we entreat Him to stir up the wills of His faithful people, that they "plenteously bringing forth the fruit of good works" may of Him "be plenteously rewarded."[a]

Living as we do in an age which is pre-eminently devoted to the philosophy of experience, we may be disposed, at first, to look somewhat askance at such a conception as that of grace. We do not see it; we cannot catch and examine it through a microscope; we only know that there are effects which seem to presuppose some such agency. Then Revelation tells us what the unseen agency is. But does not this recall man's experience in the history of the physical sciences? Century after century apples fell from the trees and stones dropped from the hands of men, before the eyes of men, always downwards towards the ground, never upwards into the air; and yet no one thought of asking why this should be. In the first decade of the seventeenth century Kepler arrived at clear ideas about the law of gravitation. He saw that the earth attracts a stone more than the stone attracts the earth; that bodies move towards each other in the proportion of their masses. At the close of the century Newton published his *Principia*. On the principle that all bodies attract each other with forces directly as their masses, and inversely as the squares of their distances, he was prepared to account for all the movements of the celestial bodies. The magnificent force or law of attraction was revealed by this prince of science to the human intelligence; but it was just as invisible as it had been in ages when its existence was unsuspected—invisible in itself, visible through its effects. In like manner, our earliest forefathers gazed upon the

[a] Collect for Twenty-fifth Sunday after Trinity.

lightning and listened to the thunder with awe and apprehension; the subtle force which we know as electricity was unknown to, unimagined by them; we have learnt to take it captive, to make it a public, almost a domestic servant; to bid it wait behind a desk in every post-office in the country, and then carry our thought with the speed of lightning to the other end of the town, or across the Atlantic, as we may wish. Yet we see it just as little as did the rudest of our forefathers; it does our work, but it remains inaccessible to our observation; its effects tell us that it is there; but in vain do we attempt to bring it forth into the light of day, into the sphere which is governed and explored by the senses. And thus we are reminded of that force in the spiritual world which we are considering. First of all, men noted the effects of grace; then they were informed of its reality, its source, its power; but, in itself, and to the last, grace remains invisible, like the electric fluid, or the force of attraction, yet assuredly, in the world of spirit, at least as real and energetic a force as they.

III.

Here, then, we see a fourth blessing of the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ into this human world: He reveals to us the nature, and He fully secures to us the gift of grace. That solemn blessing with which St. Paul closes his Second Epistle to the Corinthians,[a] and which is repeated day by day at the close of our Morning and Evening Prayer, is no empty rhetorical courtesy; it describes an actual gift from Heaven. As St. John says, grace as well as truth came by Jesus Christ.[b] "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all evermore." Remark, it is not here the grace of the Holy Spirit. It is

[a] 2 Cor. xiii. 14. [b] St. John i. 14.

the "communion" or "fellowship of the Holy Spirit;" but "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ." St. John, indeed, says expressly that "grace and truth;" that is, the full gift of grace, and the full revelation of truth, "came by Jesus Christ;" and in the Christmas Collect which we have been using to-day, the Church directly connects it with His Nativity. It existed before His Day; it was given here and there under the old Covenant; the Psalms of David are full of it. But Jesus Christ unveiled it in its completeness, and conferred it in its power; to Him we owe the full knowledge and use of this spiritual force which our fallen nature in its weakness so greatly needs for right action, and for intrepid resistance to evil. And from Him and His immediate envoys we know Who is the immediate Administrator of this force; and what it is pre-eminently meant to effect; and what are our most assured points of contact with it.

The immediate Minister of Grace, then, is revealed by our Lord to be the Holy and Eternal Spirit. Whether as breathing in the individual intelligence, the individual heart; or as filling, governing, and sanctifying the whole Church; or as transfiguring the Sacraments from dead forms into life-giving realities—the Holy Spirit is the Conveyer of Grace. All that is really good in the Christian, or in the Christian Church; all that asserts truth, all that tends to purity, all that fosters charity, comes from Him. The regenerate soul and the whole Spiritual Society are alike His temple. The prophecy of Joel[a] is accomplished; God hath poured out His Spirit upon all flesh; the stream is widening year by year to embrace the nations. The Awful and Blessed Minister of the Grace of God descended on the Church at Pentecost.[b]

But, then, observe, the gift is not less originally due to

[a] Joel ii. 28. [b] Acts ii. 1–4.

our Lord Jesus Christ. The work of the Holy Spirit is sometimes represented as so entirely separate from the work of Christ, that one dispensation is said to have ended at the Ascension, and another to have begun on Whitsunday. This serious misapprehension is due to the forgetfulness of our Lord's real relation to the coming of the Holy Spirit. As from all Eternity the Spirit proceeds from the Son as from the Father, so in time the Spirit is sent from the Father through the Son. Until Christ had ascended, He tells us, the Spirit could not be sent. "If I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you."[a] Just before departing, He bade them "tarry in the city of Jerusalem, until they were endued with Power from on high."[b] It came, we know, to those twelve poor, unlettered men; the power of mental illumination, the power of enkindled affections, above all, the power of unconquerable will. But although the Spirit was the Minister, the Giver of the gift was Christ; and the gift was the new force of grace in its unstinted fulness.

We are taught how it is that grace acts on us; what is the secret of its enabling power. It unites us to, it makes us partakers in, the Divine Humanity; the glorified Human Nature of the Son of God. This is why the Spirit is so constantly called "the Spirit of Christ."[c] His work is to unite us to Christ, to robe us in our Lord's Perfect Nature; that new nature by which the Second Adam would repair, and more than repair, what the first had lost. The Eternal Spirit does not act apart; He sets up in the Church and in the heart an inward presence. But that presence is the Presence,

[a] St. John xvi. 7. [b] St. Luke xxiv. 49.
[c] Rom. viii. 9; Phil. i. 19; 1 St. Pet. i. 11.

not of Himself only, but of the Son of Man. How much does St. Paul make of that one phrase, which covers so majestic a truth—the being "in Christ"![a] Well, the work of making us "very members incorporate" of the Holy Body of Christ is the Spirit's masterpiece: "By one Spirit we are all baptized into one Body."[b]

Again and again we are told in the Bible that union with Christ's Humanity is the great blessing of the Christian life; that Christ lives, speaks, acts in those who are spiritually one with Him; that His Life is incorporate with theirs, and theirs with His; and that this is the work of His Spirit. So St. Paul, of himself, "I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me;"[c] to the Colossians, "Christ in you, the Hope of glory;"[d] to the Ephesians, "We are members of His Body, of His Flesh, and of His Bones;"[e] to the Corinthians, "Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ?"[f] When the Emperor Trajan visited Antioch, he summoned before him Ignatius, a disciple of the Apostles, Bishop of the infant Christian Church in that city. Ignatius went by the name of Theophoros, or the "bearer of God," and this name, we are told, added to the hatred and suspicion with which he was regarded by the surrounding heathen. To the Emperor's question whether it was he who led others to destruction, and was inhabited by an evil spirit, Ignatius replied in the negative. To a second question, why men called him Theophoros, he answered, that it was because he bore within him Christ the Lord. To a third question, in which surprise predominated, whether he really had within him the Man Who, years before, had been crucified under Pontius Pilate, Ignatius answered, "Thou sayest it; for it is written, 'I will dwell in them and

[a] 2 Cor. v. 17. [b] 1 Cor. xii. 13. [c] Gal. ii. 20.
[d] Col. i. 27. [e] Eph. v. 30. [f] 1 Cor. vi. 15.

walk in them.'"[a] It was the sense of this Inward Presence of the Lord Jesus, bestowed by His Spirit, which gave Ignatius—a feeble old man—the more than natural force to endure all that followed.[b]

We Christians are taught that the certificated points of contact, so to call them, with this stream of grace, administered by the Spirit, and consisting in union with the Manhood of our Lord, are the Christian Sacraments. No doubt the Holy Spirit acts elsewhere; He breathes in prayer, He illuminates Scripture, He bears in upon the soul in the closet and by the wayside thoughts and resolves which lead it up to God. And He acts upon us mysteriously in a hundred ways which we never suspect. "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, and canst not tell whence it cometh, or whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit."[c] But His master-work of uniting us poor fallen men to the One Sinless Man is revealed as being effected in a special manner through the Christian Sacraments; and this is the real reason for the position of commanding importance which they occupy in the faith and life of Christians. They are, says Jeremy Taylor, in his *Worthy Communicant*, "an extension of the Incarnation"—mark the expression, for it sets forth vividly a pregnant truth; they carry forward its power into Christian history; they pour a full tide of the very Life of

[a] 2 Cor. vi. 16.

[b] This is a condensed version of the conversation which is given in the Antiochene Acts of the martyrdom of St. Ignatius, which rest on much better evidence than that which can be produced for the Roman Acts. Cf. Bishop Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*, ii. 478. It should be added that Bishop Lightfoot differs from Pearson and Ussher when he rejects the account of the conversation at Antioch.

[c] St. John iii. 8.

Christ into the souls and bodies of Christians. "As many as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ."[a] "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of Heaven."[b] "Whoso eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh condemnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's Body."[c] "The bread which we break, is it not the Communion of the Body of Christ? The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the Communion of the Blood of Christ?"[d] "Except ye eat the Flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His Blood, ye have no life in you."[e] Tricks, of course, may be played with all this language, so as to make it mean little or nothing; just as tricks are played with those great passages which teach the propitiatory virtue of our Lord's Atoning Death. And there are, undoubtedly, many well-intentioned Christians, who desire to be loyal to our Lord, but who are unable to understand this side of His Revelation of His Work. They think that they do Him a particular kind of honour by depreciating the value of His Sacramental gifts, because they say that if we think too highly of the gifts, we may forget the Giver. It is, of course, possible to think more of the gift than of the Giver; of life, for instance, or health, or fortune, or means of usefulness, or happy years spent in a happy home, than of God. Many of us do this; but if we do, it is not rational to say, "Because I wish to think only of the Giver, I shall insist on the worthlessness of the gift." It surely were better to say, "Because I value the gift so highly, I ought to be proportionately grateful to the Giver." Our Lord is not really honoured when His creatures maintain that Baptism is only a ceremony which gives a child a name, and membership in a Society;

[a] Gal. iii. 27. [b] St. John iii. 5. [c] 1 Cor. xi. 29.
[d] *Ib.* x. 16. [e] St. John vi. 53.

He is not really honoured by our saying that the Holy Communion is only a means for recalling to the imagination of His followers the memory of His Death. If Baptism only gives a child a name, the name might as well be given at a registrar's office. If the Eucharist only serves as a reminder of a past event in the life of an absent Christ, a chapter in the Gospels, or a well-executed engraving of the Crucifixion, might do much better than eating mere bread and wine in public. That the Sacraments should exist at all under such a system as the Gospel, is itself a revelation of their real character. Unless the Sacraments are, as the Prayer-book calls them, "means," that is, "channels of grace," they have no real place whatever in the Christian System. For the Gospel differs from the Law, as the substance differs from the shadow; and Sacraments which are symbols, and nothing but symbols, are in no way better than the legal ordinances, and have no place in the Gospel of Christ. Those who see no higher meaning in them than symbols, would be logically right in dispensing with them altogether; but they are generally, and happily, stopped short of this by our Lord's express command. For His command to baptize all nations,[a] and to do to the end of time what He did in the Supper-room, of itself implies that the Sacraments are solemn realities; acts on His part towards us, not mere instruments for raising our thoughts towards Him. Thus Hooker says, in his thoughtful way, that "Christ and His Holy Spirit, with all their blessed effects, though entering into the soul of man, we are not able to apprehend or express how, do notwithstanding give notice of the times when They are to make their access, because it pleaseth Almighty God to communicate by sensible means those blessings which are incomprehensible."[b]

[a] St. Matt. xxviii. 19, 20.

[b] *Ecclesiastical Polity*, v. 57, 3.

The ground of Christ's Sacramental Gifts is God's promise, and not man's confidence; their reality does not vary with the varying moods of dejection or elation in the Christian soul; like His Love, like His Providence, like His Justice, like His Power, they last on from age to age, channels of His Grace, whatever be the changes in modes of thought, or religious habits, or outward usages in the Christian Church. They are the assured points of contact with that Divine Humanity of the Son of God Which is the instrument of our renewal.

But, it will be objected, is there no danger of our treating them as charms which will always operate; is there no risk of a man thinking that it does not matter much what he is, or how he lives, if he only complies with certain Sacramental prescriptions; if he has been christened, and is a regular communicant? Have we not heard of "a materialism of the altar and the sacristy which is as bad as the materialism of the lecture-room;" and is there not reason to fear that the natural tendency of man to rest in the external and visible, rather than in the spiritual and the unseen, may here receive dangerous support and encouragement?

My brethren, let it be at once admitted that Sacraments are no more exempt than any other of God's gifts from misuse through the perverseness and wrongheadedness of man. No book has been so misused for directly mischievous and immoral purposes as the Bible. But that does not forfeit for the Bible its character of the best of all books. No truth has been more sedulously pressed in the interests of an immoral antinomianism than the doctrine of Christ's Atonement. Yet that does not make it less certainly the truth which, as the highest Revelation of the Tenderness of the Heart of God, has a pre-eminent power to chasten and purify the heart of man. Granted

that the Sacraments have been and are abused by any who, in using them, forget either their character or their purpose; they are not on that account less truly the very chiefest blessings of the Gospel of Christ. They are, indeed, moral, and not physical means of grace; they do not always produce their proper, or the same effect, as does fire, which always burns and gives light. And the reason is, because they act upon a being who has the power of resisting their action, and who must welcome it by proper dispositions if it is to do him good. This does not apply to the case of a baptized infant, where the soul is as yet passive, and Christ's grace therefore irresistible; but it does apply to all Sacraments received by adults. More than this, grace once given, whether in baptism or otherwise, may be lost by unfaithfulness; it is so far from being a licence to do wrong, that in doing wrong voluntarily a man certainly forfeits it. It is easy to misuse, but it is not easy to over-estimate, these majestic acts of the Invisible Christ, whereby, through the Agency of His Spirit, He knits His redeemed to that Human Nature of His which, to quote the words of Jackson, "by the inhabitation of Deity, is made to us an inexhaustible fountain of life."[a] This is the secret of that deepest of all joys which Christian souls know here on earth. Kneeling before the Altar in the early morning, when as yet the world has claimed nothing of our renewed faculties, and we can give our freshest and our best to God, we know what it is "so to eat the Flesh of the Son of God, and to drink His Blood, that our sinful bodies are made clean by His Body, and our souls washed through His most Precious Blood."[b] We humbly trust that this blessed union begun in time will

[a] Jackson, *Comm. on Creed*, xi. 3, 10.

[b] Communion Service, Prayer of Humble Access.

last throughout eternity; that "we shall evermore dwell in Him, and He in us."[a] Then it is that souls win their strength against the labours, the troubles, the anxieties of life; then do they most efficiently prepare for that last moment which awaits us all.

And this union with our Lord is the culminating blessing which He brought to us when He visited us from on high. His Example, His Instructions, His Pardon and Reconciliation, lead up to it. For by uniting us with Himself, the Perfect Moral Being restores our fallen nature to more than its original glory, and fitly crowns His Redemptive Work. We "can do all things through Christ That strengtheneth us;"[b] for "we live, yet not we, but Christ liveth in us."[c] He inhabits, He takes possession of, His devoted servants; thinking in them, speaking by them, acting through them. Their union with Him is so complete as to make them outward organs of His invisible Life. These triumphs of His grace differ in degree; throughout the spiritual world "one star differeth from another star in glory."[d] But in all there is the presence of a new force which comes from union with Christ's Humanity; and poor weak human nature is made strong in the Lord and in the power of His Might.

The last Sunday in the year warns us to lay to heart the meaning of our Lord's Coming to each one of ourselves. That heart-rending scene at Shipton on Christmas Eve,[e] the details of which have filled the papers, and

[a] Communion Service. [b] Phil. iv. 13. [c] Gal. ii. 20. [d] 1 Cor. xv. 41.

[e] Dec. 24, 1874. The disaster occurred on the Oxford and Birmingham Railway, near Shipton-on-Cherwell, about six miles from Oxford. The tire of a wheel belonging to a third-class carriage broke, when the train was travelling at the rate of forty miles an hour; and the carriage plunged down an embankment, carrying with it several others. Thirty-one persons were killed on the spot, and nearly fifty injured people were taken to the Radcliffe Infirmary, at Oxford.

haunt our memories, show us how thin may be the veil which separates us, even during our most ordinary occupations, from the invisible world. The object of all that has been said to you during the past month has been to strengthen your convictions that One Being only can help you through "the darkness and the shadow of death, and guide your feet into the way of peace." Let each ask himself—Is He my Model, or do I place other ideals of life high above Him? Is He my Instructor, or do I prefer the language of human philosophers, human teachers, human doubts, to His? Is His Atoning Death my hope of acceptance; or am I imagining that I shall be fitted for the Presence-Chamber of the Holiest by my own natural excellences? Finally, is union with Him—closer and closer union, through His Spirit and Sacramental gifts—the practical object of my redeemed life; or am I saying to myself, that if my sins are pardoned, His work is done, and it little matters whether or not I am making the best use of His Bounty?—Compared with these inquiries, the questions which too often occupy us are trivial indeed. We are immortal beings, trembling on the brink of an existence which will be at once irretrievably fixed and absolutely endless. May He, our Friend and Patron, Who is always Tender and always Strong, deign in His Mercy to lighten our darkness, and so defend us from the perils and dangers of this brief earthly night, that His Example, His Instructions, His Redemption, His Gift of a new nature, may be the theme of our joy and praise to all Eternity!

SERMON XV.

THE BIBLE A PREPARATION FOR HEREAFTER.

(SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT.)

ROM. XV. 4.

Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.

THIS verse seems to show why the Epistle and Gospel for the Second Sunday in Advent were chosen to be used together. At first sight they have not much in common. The Gospel describes the signs which shall precede Christ's coming to judge the world; the Epistle presents us with the witness of Jewish prophecy to the privileges reserved for converted heathen nations in the kingdom of Christ. And this is prefaced by the statement that whatsoever things were written in the bygone ages of Israel were written for the learning of Christians; that they, through the perseverance and comfort which Scripture teaches, might have hope in the still anxious future. Here we touch the point of connection between Epistle and Gospel. The future of every soul, the future of the Church, the future of the world, is, as the Gospel reminds us, in Christian eyes bound up with one tremendous and assured catastrophe—Christ's coming to Judgment. And the Epistle would suggest that among the

means of preparation for that great event is the careful use of those ancient and consecrated writings, in which God has unveiled His Love and His Will. Scripture, in fact, is here presented to us in one particular aspect; it is a source of that knowledge which kindles and invigorates hope, and so enables us duly to prepare for the future Judgment.

I.

Consider, first of all, what St. Paul's first readers would have understood him to mean. By the "Scripture," or "Scriptures," the Roman Christians would not have understood the whole Christian Bible of our day. For them the word meant only the Hebrew Sacred Writings—the Books of the Old Testament. With one exception,[a] the word "Scriptures" is used in this sense throughout the New Testament. When our Lord told the Jews to search the Scriptures,[b] there is no doubt about His meaning the Jewish Scriptures; nor yet when He expounded to His disciples "in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself;"[c] nor yet when He said, with reference to His Death and Resurrection, that "the Scriptures must be fulfilled;"[d] nor yet when He sadly observed to the Sadducees, "Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures."[e] For the Apostles, as for the Jews, in the days of our Lord's Ministry, there were no Scriptures, excepting those of the Old Testament. And the word "Scriptures" has the same restricted meaning when Apollos is said to have been "mighty in the Scriptures;"[f] and the Bereæans to have "searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so;"[g] and Timothy to have "known the Holy Scriptures

[a] 2 St. Pet. iii. 16. [b] St. John v. 39. [c] St. Luke xxiv. 27.
[d] St. Mark xiv. 49. [e] St. Matt. xxii. 29.
[f] Acts xviii. 24. [g] *Ib.* xvii. 10, 11.

from a child;"[a] and the Scripture to have "concluded all under sin."[b] When all this was said and written, the New Testament was only in process of formation; and it may be questioned whether, even when all Scripture is said by St. Paul to be given by Inspiration of God,[c] he was thinking of any of the Books of the New Testament, although, undoubtedly, when he wrote thus some of them were already in circulation. To the Apostles, until quite the close of their lives, Scripture meant only the Sacred Books of the Jews. In the earliest Christian Church the Jewish Bible was the Bible; it was the one current handbook of religious knowledge. It was given, not only to Jewish converts, who generally had it already; but to converts from heathendom. To the earliest Church this Jewish Bible spoke of Christ from first to last. He had recently been among men; hundreds were living who had seen and heard Him. But here He had been described by anticipation in a literature which extended over a thousand years, and they could see with their own eyes the points of the correspondence, and could feel its force. St. Matthew's Gospel especially, which insists so carefully on the fulfilment of the Jewish Scriptures in our Lord's acts and words at each stage of the narrative, was written under the influence of this feeling; and St. Paul, in his Epistles, uses the Old Testament for present purposes in a similar way. When he would warn the Corinthians against the trials of the Christian life, he refers to the temptations and falls of the Israelites in the desert.[d] When, writing to the Galatians, he is contrasting the Church of Christ, the heiress of the patriarchal promises, with the Jewish nation which had rejected this inheritance in rejecting Christ, he simply recalls the story of Isaac

[a] 2 Tim. iii. 15.
[b] Gal. iii. 22.
[c] 2 Tim. iii. 16.
[d] 1 Cor. x. 1–11.

and Ishmael.[a] When he is seeking a title for God's new people, gathered out of all the nations of the world, he can find no better than the "Israel of God."[b] When the awful import of our Lord's Death upon the Cross has to be stated, St. Paul chooses his words from those of the Jewish Ritual of Sacrifice;[c] when Christ's Ascension is in question, the entrance of the High Priest into the Holy of Holies suggests the language which shall describe it.[d] In short, for those first Christians, the Old Testament was a record, not merely of the glories of Abraham, Moses, and David, but in and through them, and pre-eminently, of the glories of Jesus Christ; not merely of the past annals of Israel, but of their own days, and of the future of Christendom.

And therefore St. Paul told the Romans that the Jewish Scriptures were written for their learning, though they lived in a later age, and on a foreign soil, and under new religious circumstances. If they would, they might learn patience, consolation, hope, from the records of ancient Israel. What God had been, that He was still, that He would be. What He had been to His ancient people, that, and much more, He would be to the new Israel; to the people who had been redeemed by Jesus Christ. That history, those examples, those rich and magnificent prophecies, had not been set down for nothing in the ancient Scriptures. The times might be dark and hearts might be heavy; but "whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope."

But if St. Paul's words mean this, they also mean to us much more than this. Since the days when the

[a] Gal. iv. [b] *Ib.* vi. 16. [c] Heb. ix. 1–22. [d] *Ib.* 24.

Epistle to the Romans was written, the word "Scriptures" has acquired a new and enlarged meaning. It now includes, besides the Old Testament, the twenty-seven books of the New. Although this addition was completed within the first century, it was not recognized by Christendom all at once; the Church could not at once understand how great an addition had been made to her treasures. We see the beginning of the process within the New Testament itself. When St. Peter says that the unlearned and unstable wrest, to their own destruction, many things hard to be understood in St. Paul's Epistles, as well as in the *other* Scriptures, he implies that some of these Epistles of St. Paul were already considered Scriptures.[n] But there were many counterfeit writings abroad, and a great deal of sifting was necessary, if the inspired wheat was to be separated from the uninspired chaff. Thus it came to pass that, so far as can be ascertained now, the four Gospels were fully recognized in the third quarter of the second century, and the whole New Testament Canon as it stands, at least by the Catholic Church, in the fourth century. Doubtless it had been largely authoritative from the first; the Church's recognition did not make Scripture to be God's Word; but the delay in this recognition is a matter of fact, and it was due to a reverent dread of making a mistake in a matter of such vast importance.

But now, what St. Paul said of the Old Testament, we may say of the New, of the whole Christian Bible, and not least of these glorious Epistles, which are his own contributions to it. All of these Scriptures, New as well as Old, are written for our learning in these later ages; and our business is to make the most of the lesson.

[n] 2 St. Pet. iii. 16.

II.

What, let us ask, is the true purpose of Holy Scripture; why was it written? St. Paul replies: "Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning." And what kind of learning? we ask. St. Paul answers again: "That we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have," not simply information, but "hope." Scripture, then, is a Book of moral or spiritual learning; it is addressed to the heart and will rather than to the intellect. It is a Book for the understanding, no doubt; but it is much more a Book for the spirit, for the heart.

There are many other kinds of learning to be got out of the Bible. It is a great manual of Eastern antiquities; it gives us information about the ancient world which we can obtain nowhere else. It carries us back to the early dawn of history, when as yet all that we commonly mean by civilization did not exist. Again, it is a handbook of political experience; it shows us what a nation can do, and may have to suffer; how it may be affected by the conduct of its rulers; how it may make its rulers to be like itself. So, again, it is a rich collection of the wisdom which should govern personal conduct; a man need not believe in Revelation in order to admire the shrewdness and penetration of the Book of Proverbs. Again, it is a mine of poetry; it contains the very highest poetry which the human race possesses; poetry before which the great masters of song, Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, must bow; poetry by which the two last have been, in fact, themselves largely inspired. Once more, it is a choice field for the study of language; in its pages we follow one language, the Hebrew, from its cradle to its grave; and it gives us lessons in the art of making

language describe the emotions and moods of the soul which are not to be found elsewhere.

Learning of this kind has its value, of course; and some of it, or rather much of it, is necessary if we are to make the most of this precious Book. But it is not the learning of which St. Paul says that the Scriptures were meant to impart it to Christians. A man may have much of it, yet he may miss altogether the true lessons which Scripture has to teach. A man may be a good antiquarian, historian, economist, linguist, moralist; he may take the keenest interest in Scripture because it has so much to say on each and all of these subjects; and yet he may be entirely ignorant of the true teaching of Scripture. He may read the Bible, just as some people come to church, only to admire the architecture or the music, thus missing the very end which these beautiful and useful accessories of worship are intended to promote—the communion of the soul with God. Language, history, poetry, antiquities,—these are not the subjects which the Bible was intended to teach us, interesting and valuable as they are in their way; they are taught in other books, ancient and modern, and by human teachers. The Bible must do something more for us than this, if it is to claim its title as the Book of God.

"That we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope." That is the end of the highest learning which Scripture has to communicate. And whatever else we get, we do not get patience, comfort, hope, out of language, or poetry, or political economy, or antiquities, or abstract morality. Scripture teaches, over and above these, something more; more valuable and more potent, which does generate patience, comfort, hope. And on this, surely, as a matter of common sense, it is well to keep and fix our eyes, even though we should perforce

neglect the rest. What is this learning? It is the revelation or unveiling of God, as a Living and Moral Being, Who knows and can supply all that we need; Who is what He has always been; Who will ever be what He is. In His great attributes of Righteousness and Mercy, He is the subject of the Old Testament. In His astonishing intervention, on the scene of human history, in the Person of His Son, He is the subject of the New. All that belongs to human life pales before this, the central and dominant theme of the Bible—God, as revealed, first partially, then most vividly and unreservedly, to the soul of man.

But, as the Bible is the Book of God, so it is, emphatically, the Book of the Future.

At first sight it seems to be altogether a book of the past. It is made up of ancient history, ancient biographies, ancient poetry, ancient advice about conduct, ancient legislation which has had its day. Nearly eighteen centuries have passed since the last page of it was written. And since then how vast has been the experience of the world; its experience of improvement and its experience of failure! Why, men have asked, should we be invited to look backward instead of looking forward? Why should we expect to wring by study out of an old-world chronicle more than can be supplied by that modern literature which embodies our own larger and ever-accumulating experience?

Ah! brethren, if the Bible were only a book of the past, this question would be reasonable enough; but although its form is that which was suited to the ancient world, its thought and substance are of no one epoch in human history; they belong to all time. In it God speaks to the soul of man. And this Divine Voice is not

like an old building or an old language, bearing upon it the imprint of disuse and decay; it is always new. From age to age God is the same; He does not change. And from age to age the soul is the same; it does not change. And thus, though the Bible is written in two ancient tongues, and though it spoke to men and to nations that have long passed away, yet it also speaks, not less searchingly and directly, to us. There is that in it which is independent of the vicissitudes of form; making it as fresh and undying as the Mind and Heart of God; making it as perfectly abreast of the newest thought and the most daring aspirations of the modern world, as He could be conceived to be Who made it. "Thy Word, O Lord, endureth for ever in Heaven. Thy Truth also remaineth from one generation to another: Thou hast laid the foundation of the earth, and it abideth." [a]

And because the Bible, notwithstanding the antiquity of its form, is a strictly modern handbook, which keeps well abreast of the wants and thoughts of the modern world, therefore it is also something more: it is the Book of the Future. For what man now is, that, in the main, he will be in the generations to come; and what God was in the beginning and is now, that He ever shall be, world without end. Hence no change in the outward circumstances of human life, or in the various departments of human knowledge, or in the modes of human thought from age to age, can affect the lasting authority and worth of the Bible. It is lifted high up out of the reach of these changes by the simple fact that it is the Book of God; its future is assured because its truest and deepest lessons belong, not to time, but to eternity.

If man's destiny ended here, or if the Bible addressed itself only to man's earthly life, the case would be different.

[a] Ps. cxix. 89, 90.

But the Bible addresses man, sometimes avowedly, always tacitly, as a being who will live hereafter; who has, in fact, before him an illimitable future. And as man gazes out anxiously into this future, of which his natural wit and reason give him the presentiment; this untried future, which stretches away indistinctly before him into the bosom of the Infinite; the Bible does not fail him. On the contrary, it introduces form and outline, distinction and contrast, precise and awful, yet blessed certainty, into this region, which else would be the land of vague and gloomy anticipations. The Bible is the Book of the Future, the Book of Hope; it pierces the veil between this and another life; it takes us by the hand, just where Nature fails us, and it points to the Realms of Light.

There are many other strictly spiritual uses or purposes of Scripture, no doubt, besides the production and strengthening of hope. It would be true to say that it had been written that we might learn faith, or obedience, or charity. Indeed, they are not uninspired words which say that it "is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works."[a] But the encouragement of hope is what St. Paul here insists on, and for reasons which must be plain to all of us. We need hope; it is the nerve, the backbone, of all true life; of all serious efforts to battle with evil and to live for God. For the majority of men, especially as the years pass, life is made up of much which disheartens. The sunshine of early years has past, and the evening of life is shrouded by clouds and disappointment. Failure, disappointment, sorrow, the sense of a burden of past sin, the presentiment of approaching death,—these things

[a] 2 Tim. iii. 16, 17.

weigh down the spirit of multitudes. Something is needed which shall lift us out of this circle of depressing circumstances; which shall enlarge our horizon, and enable us to find in the future that which the present has ceased to yield. This, indeed, is felt by those thinkers and writers who have little or no respect for the Christian Revelation, but who insist largely upon the hope and reality of human progress, of an indefinite "good time coming" to the world and to man. True, when we come to look at what they have to offer, it does not amount to much; but at least they do homage to that necessity which is satisfied for Christians in Holy Scripture; the necessity of "a hope set before us,"[a] to relieve discouragement, to stimulate effort, to raise the whole level and meaning of existence.

And here, let me repeat, the Bible helps us as no other book does or can. It stands alone as the warrant and stimulant of hope; it speaks with a Divine authority, and it opens a future which no human authority can attest. There are many human books which do what they can in this direction; but they can only promise—if they *can* promise—something better than what we have at present on this side the grave. There are many books which do what they can to establish hope on a surer and a wider basis; but, then, so far as they are trustworthy, they only echo the Bible. The Bible is pre-eminently the Book of Hope; in it God draws the veil which hangs between man and his awful future, and bids him take heart, and arise and live.

III.

And, in order to make good use of the Bible, a humble and sensible man will take a guide. In this Book of books, God's "righteousness standeth like the strong

[a] Heb. vi. 18.

mountains;" His "judgments are like the great deep."[a] Wise people do not try to climb the Alps alone, or go to sea in a skiff without a compass. If the Bible were a mere human book, we might easily explore its heights and depths for ourselves; but precisely because it is superhuman—superhuman alike in its substance and in its proportions—we may easily lose ourselves (tens of thousands do) in the attempt to explore it. He Who gives us the Bible, gives us, in the voice of that early undivided Christian Church which recognized it for what it is, a guide to its meaning. In her Creeds, and in the general sense of her great teachers, we find a clue to the real unity and drift of Scripture; not overlaying it, as may have been done by others, with any new or foreign element, but drawing our attention to those truths in it which are of most vital moment, and thus form the key to the meaning of all besides.

It is often said, probably with too much reason, that we Christians of this day make less use of the Bible than did our forefathers. Perhaps the high pressure of modern life, the increase of periodical literature, a relaxation of the strictness of old religious habits, may partly account for this. Perhaps good people have taken to use other books of devotion, which leave them little or no time for the Sacred Scriptures. But, however we may account for it, it is a great misfortune. In the life of the soul no book can take the place of the Bible; not even the very choicest of devotional books, such as the *Imitation of Christ*, by Thomas à Kempis, or the *Spiritual Combat*. In the Bible we handle the masterpiece of the Holy Spirit set forth in human speech; the one work which human frailty has not been allowed to disfigure with some taint of evil passion or of intellectual error. And the least a good

[a] Ps. xxxvi. 6.

Christian can do is to follow the Daily Lessons as they are set before us in the Services of the Church, so that at the end of the year, if he is a devout and attentive reader, he may have some considerable acquaintance with its general substance. But, besides this, something more personal should be attempted. The question, What does the Bible say to me? should be answered. Especially in order, "by patience and comfort of the Scriptures," to have hope, we should look out beforehand for the great trials and catastrophes of life, and fix upon and study those parts of the written Word of God which will best help us to meet them.

For instance, how much of life, sooner or later, is sorrow! "Man is born to sorrow, as the sparks fly upwards."[a] Young people, naturally enough, do not believe this, except, of course, as an authoritative sentence; they have not that conviction of its truth which comes from experience. All goes well with them; with them it is still the poet's "formosissimus annus;" the springtime of life; the time of bright sunshine and singing birds and opening flowers. There are exceptions, no doubt; but a boyhood like that of Louis XVII. of France, in the dungeons of the Temple at Paris, is, thank God, more cheerless and miserable than that of the mass of poor children who lead the hardest lives. In those days of high spirits and buoyant strength, it seems as though life must always be bright; and yet how different, as many of us know, is the reality! Years pass, and the early objects of our affection are one by one withdrawn. Or there are years of bright and active life; and then comes one crushing blow. Everything is darkened. In the shadow it is difficult to know what to fall back upon.

[a] Job v. 7.

Men lose their heads; they cannot, at a moment's notice, create settled convictions; they cannot see the Hand Which is held out to support and save them. Oh! what a blessing, in those days of trial, to have already fixed the soul's eye intently on some one passage in the Divine Word, such as that in the twelfth chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews;[a] to have put a great red line against it in the Book which has been ours from childhood; to have again and again read, marked, learnt, and inwardly digested it; so that when the day of sorrow comes, it at once presents itself in the Name and with the authority of God, to give us the help we need! "Ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children. My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of Him: for whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. . . . Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby."[b] Are not these words, though written some eighteen centuries since, written indeed for our learning in the dark days of sorrow, that we, through the endurance and consolation which the Scriptures supply, might even in our darkest hours have hope?

Then there is that which is worse than sorrow, if we only knew it; the burden of wilful sin. Certainly a Christian is supposed, by the very terms of his regeneration, to be dead to sin, so that he cannot live any

[a] Heb. xii. 1–11. [b] *Ib.* 5–8, 11.

longer therein. Certainly "he that is born of God sinneth not."[a] And yet, as a matter of fact, "if we [Christians] say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."[b] The regenerate man does not sin, so far as he is regenerate; that in him which sins is an alien quality or force, a survival of his old unrenewed nature, which for the moment has got the mastery of his will. Still it is not less surely sin; and the worse sin, because it is against grace and light. Those persons are indeed to be pitied, who so misunderstand the great promises of Scripture as to imagine that, do what they may, they cannot sin, since they have a sort of physical or mechanical insurance against this, or, rather, since sin ceases to be itself when they commit it. They have to consider such sentences as "He that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as He is Righteous."[c] But, to most men of honest heart and intent, to have fallen from grace as David fell, or as Peter fell; to be conscious of loss of insight, loss of strength, loss of the light of God's countenance, is misery. The waters have rushed in upon such a soul; it stands fast in the deep mire where no ground is; it is come into deep waters, so that the floods run over it. It is weary of crying; its throat is dry; its sight faileth for waiting so long[d]—without light and peace. Ah! in these dark extremities, where there seems to be no outlet; where conscience is hemmed in as it were between the accusing fact and the impending judgment, men have sought relief in spiritual numbness, to be created by new sins; or they have plunged wildly, by a supreme and irreversible crime, into another state of existence, on the threshold of which they must meet their Judge. What would it not have been for such to have spent thought and

[a] 1 St. John v. 18. [b] *Ib.* i. 8.
[c] *Ib.* iii. 7. [d] Ps. lxix. 1–3.

prayer over that great unveiling of the Heart of God; the Parable of the Prodigal Son! A son, yet a prodigal; a son, yet so far from his father and his home; a son, yet feeding on the husks that the swine did eat! And then on those vigorous words which speak again in the souls of all penitents to the end: "I will arise and go to my Father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against Heaven, and before Thee, and am no more worthy to be called Thy son: make me as one of thine hired servants."[a] And then on the reception, so joyous and so festive, in the father's halls; on the unimagined embrace, the ineffable welcome. Think you, my brethren, that that parable—a true utterance of the Heart of the All-Merciful—cannot still shed a ray of hope into the sinful conscience; now that He Who uttered it has shed His Blood that He might warrant the pardon which He thus proclaims? Surely here Scripture furnishes consolation and hope for those sinners who need and will have it!

Then there is that which awaits us all; the last scene; the approach of death. To some, indeed, it comes suddenly, so suddenly that there is neither warning nor presentiment. This is the Advent of the Son of Man as the thief in the night,[b] or as the lightning which flasheth from the east unto the west.[c] To more—such is God's indulgence—death gives warnings of its approach; in some cases many and protracted warnings, extending over long periods of time—over years. These are, for the soul, the signs of the Son of Man in heaven. Those new sensations of weakness and powerlessness, those gradually enforced alterations of daily habit, this importunate and irrepressible sense of approaching change,—all answer to the

[a] St. Luke xv. 18, 19. [b] 1 Thess. v. 2.
[c] St. Matt. xxiv. 27.

more awful heralds on a larger scene and scale. They portend the "signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking for those things that are coming on the earth: for the powers of Heaven shall be shaken."[a] At such times, when all that is most accustomed is being parted from, when all that has been for years most assured and solid is sensibly giving way, a man needs some patience and comfort of the Scriptures; some Heaven-sent hope, if it is to be had; something that will last, as being unyielding and true amid this flux and decay of the passing and the unsubstantial. And if he be in a state of grace, at peace with and in communion with our Divine Saviour, what can help him better than those burning words which the great Apostle wrote, in far-sighted anticipation of the still distant persecution at Rome in which he lost his life; those words in which his argument loses itself in a strain of the highest poetry, which is yet the severest truth: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For Thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."[b]

Yes! those who will may find in Holy Scripture patience, consolation, hope. Not in its literary or his-

[a] St. Luke xxi. 26. [b] Rom. viii. 35–39.

torical treasures. But in the great truths it reveals about God and about man; in the great examples it holds forth of endurance and victory; in the great promises it records; in the future which it unveils to the eye of faith; above all, in the truth that "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."[a] These are the mines where the precious ore is found. A more constant, more reverent, more thorough use of Holy Scripture, is one of the appropriate duties of a season like Advent. For, to use St. Augustine's phrase,[b] the "Scriptures are letters from our heavenly country;" and we who hope, in time, to reach its shores, should learn what we can about it, and about the conditions of reaching it, while we may. Certainly we shall best prepare for the great future which awaits us all if we so read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest those Scriptures which God has given for our learning, that by patience, and comfort of His Holy Word, we embrace and hold fast that hope of everlasting life, which is given us in and with our Adorable Saviour Jesus Christ.

[a] St. John iii. 16.

[b] Enarr. in Ps. xc., serm. 2: "De illâ civitate unde peregrinamur, litteræ nobis venerunt: ipsæ sunt Scripturæ."

SERMON XVI.

INDEPENDENCE OF HUMAN OPINION.

(THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT.)

1 COR. IV. 3, 4.

But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self. For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but He that judgeth me is the Lord.

THIS is the language of a man who knows that he is exposed to sharp and unfriendly criticism. And such was St. Paul's case among the Christians at Corinth. There were some busy persons at work among them, by whom everything that the Apostle did or said was misrepresented. These persons, although Christians, were themselves for the most part anxious to retain as much as they could of the observance of the old Jewish ceremonial law; and they resented St. Paul's frequent assertion that, in typifying the work of Christ, it had done all that it could do, and was now useless, or rather, in the way.[a] Besides which, as this Epistle shows, there was much going on in the Corinthian Church which called for a sharp exercise of the Apostolic authority. There was a case of incest which, the Apostle says, even pagan morals would have condemned;[b] there was disbelief, on grounds

[a] Gal. ii. 14—iv. 11. [b] 1 Cor. v. 1–5.

derived from Greek philosophy, of the cardinal Christian doctrine of the Resurrection;[a] there was gross irreverence at the celebration of the Holy Eucharist, arising from its being closely associated with the primitive Agape, or Love-feast;[b] and less important questions of the desirableness of marriage under certain circumstances,[c] of the relative importance of some unusual gifts of the Holy Spirit,[d] even of the head-dress worn by the Corinthian ladies,[e] were keenly discussed. We all know that the exercise of authority creates opposition; and at Corinth as in Galatia, St. Paul's opponents were active and unscrupulous. They suggested that he had no true Apostolical commission at all;[f] that he was working with no such credentials as the great Apostles at Jerusalem;[g] that these Apostles were really opposed to him.[h] They played off against him at one time the authority of St. Peter, whom they called, for the sake of greater veneration, by his Syriac name of Cephas; at another, the Alexandrian learning and eloquence of Apollos; at another, the most Sacred Name of all—the Divine Master Himself.[i] They succeeded, it would seem, in creating a body of public opinion against St. Paul in the Corinthian Church, which, by the time that the Second Epistle to the Corinthians was written, had become really formidable, and at this earlier date was already troublesome; and by this hostile opinion, engaged as it was in an incessant round of observation and gossip, the Apostle was severely judged.[j] He was perfectly well aware of all that was going on; and accordingly, when, as in this chapter, he is discussing his claims as an Apostle of Christ upon the obedience and love of Christians, and

[a] 1 Cor. xv. 35, etc. [b] *Ib.* xi. 17–22. [c] *Ib.* vii.
[d] *Ib.* xiv. [e] *Ib.* xi. 1–16. [f] *Ib.* ix. 1.
[g] 2 Cor. xi. 5. [h] Gal. ii. 7–9.
[i] 1 Cor. i. 12. [j] *Ib.* iv. 5, 6.

when he has laid it down as a first requisite in a steward of the Christian mysteries that a man should be found faithful, he feels instinctively and at once that this very quality of faithfulness was exactly what a great many busy and talkative people at Corinth would deny to himself. And thus he adds the words, "With me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment."

I.

Observe, then, first of all, that at this time St. Paul was judged unfavourably at the bar of the public opinion of the Church of Corinth. And this leads us to dwell for a few minutes on the nature and authority of public opinion. What do we mean by the expression? It describes the common fund of thought which belongs to a larger or smaller number of associated human beings. No sooner are men formed into a society than, in order to keep this society together, its members instinctively create or secrete a certain deposit of thought and feeling about their common interests. To this deposit everybody contributes something, and by it everybody is tacitly understood to be in some sense bound. Society cannot be kept together merely by the outward bonds and buttresses of law; it needs the inward sympathies which a common body of thought creates in its members; and this common stock of thought or sentiment varies, both in point of intensity and in point of character, with the nature of the society. Thus every family has its public opinion; its peculiar way of looking at the persons with whom it comes into contact; its view of the events of the time, of questions of general interest, of the interests which more immediately concern itself. Every village,

every town, every city, has its public opinion; its own characteristic way of judging people and things about it; sometimes addressing itself, as, perhaps, in a Devonshire hamlet, to the most trivial issues; sometimes, as in this metropolis, to matters of even imperial interest. Again, classes and professions have each a public opinion of their own, which in some cases is very tyrannical and exacting. And above all there rises the larger public opinion which encircles and comprehends all sections of opinion. To it they all contribute; by it they are each checked and controlled in respect of that in them which is narrow and peculiar. There rises above all the public opinion of the country. This, as we know, when it is roused and expresses itself distinctly, is a tremendous force; and yet it is not the ultimate and largest form of public opinion. For as civilization advances, and the nations see and know more of each other, there is a constant tendency to form and consolidate a yet wider range of opinion than this; an opinion which shall eliminate from itself all that is merely national, and which shall aim at being that of the civilized world. This world-wide opinion will probably be more energetic in days to come than it is now; but to it, as to the opinion of the country, and to the opinion of the classes, and districts, and professions, and places which make up the country, we all contribute in our various ways, and by it, in different degrees, we are all controlled.

And as earthly societies, so Churches have a public opinion of their own, which is created by their members, and which in turn controls them. By this I do not mean the Faith or Creed which the Universal Church and all true branches of it have received from God. That rests upon God's authority; and, in a Christian estimate, it can never be a matter of mere opinion. But outside the Faith

there is a large margin of questions connected with the progress and administration of the Christian Society, and with the acts and conduct of its members, upon which the opinion of Christians is incessantly being formed; and this public Church opinion is by no means certain to be always well-informed, or always just. St. Paul stood face to face with a section of such opinion at Corinth, when he wrote, "With me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment."

II.

Remark, secondly, that St. Paul does not conceal his perfect independence of the hostile opinion of the Corinthians. Not that we can suppose him to have taken any pleasure either in feeling or proclaiming this independence. He was a man of quick sympathy, rejoicing to be sure of the love of his converts, and not caring to conceal how much they could do to promote or to mar his personal happiness.[a] But as matters stood, he brushed aside a whole world of feeling to say that he was unconcerned as to their judgment upon his faithfulness. He could not hope to be of service to them unless he was perfectly unaffected by their prejudices, and he was most likely to serve them if he told them so.

It is sometimes assumed that whenever a man defies public opinion, he must necessarily be right, because this act of defiance requires a certain amount of courage and resolution. But that this is a very rash assumption a moment's consideration will show. A man who is eccentric to the verge of madness may defy public opinion, not in the interests of truth or virtue, nor yet necessarily in the interests of vicious passion, but simply by way of

[a] Gal. iv. 12, 19, 20.

giving play and fling to his eccentricity. And in all probability public opinion will smile good-naturedly at such defiance as this, and, after voting the coxcomb to be a privileged person, whose oddities shall be rated on all hands at their real value, will pass on. But a criminal also may be at war with public opinion; indeed, when he is discovered, he cannot help being so. For public opinion asserts just so much of moral truth as is necessary to keep society together; and a criminal—to use that word in its usual restricted sense—offends against some part of that moral truth which society, in its self-defence, affirms. A bandit, or a pickpocket, or a forger, or a murderer, defies the public opinion of any civilized country as much as he defies the Law of God. So far as he is concerned, the Law of God and public opinion are, for the time being, in harmony with each other. It has, indeed, been implied, as in one famous sketch of the Life of Christ by a German writer, that because the Divine Prophet of Nazareth was in conflict with the dominant opinion of His day and country, therefore all modern forms of antagonism to social institutions are probably right. If that were true, Barabbas was already entitled to an encomium in the pages of the Evangelists, and it would be hard to show that Christ's teaching is a blessing to the social life of man. No, brethren, St. Paul was not right *because* he was opposed to Corinthian opinion; he opposed Corinthian opinion because, as against it, he was right.

The truth is, ordinary public opinion, looked at on its moral or religious side, is, from the nature of the case, a compromise. It affirms just so much moral or religious truth as, in a given state of things, will keep society together; so much and no more. It affirms not the whole law of God, but an extract from it; just so much of it, in

fact, as is likely to be useful for social purposes. Thus, at the present day, English public opinion sternly condemns murder, and punishes it with death, and in this is strictly in accordance with the Divine Law.[a] But it also permits the marriage (so to term it, under protest) of divorced persons; a proceeding which our Saviour Himself has in express terms condemned as adulterous.[b] The reason is, that murder is rightly supposed to be destructive of society, which demands an assured safety of life for all its members; while people do not generally see far enough to perceive that society will in the end be wounded in its very vitals, if human passions of another kind are permitted to shelter themselves under the sanction of the civil law. Thus, you observe, public opinion strikes an average between the impulses which it receives from above and from below, from the good and bad elements in society. And as the criminal makes war with it, because he is below it; so the true Christian is at issue with it, because he is above it. It floats between the two as the results of contributions from the lowest and the best elements in the mass of mankind; and while it protects those who obey it against some gross excesses, it fails to guide them safely if they have any desire to make the teaching of our Saviour and His Apostles the rule of their lives. It was in this last sense that St. Paul was opposed to public opinion in the Church of Corinth. It was altogether below him. It was bent upon a course which, had it succeeded, would have taken the heart out of Christianity, by virtually denying the all-sufficient virtue of the Redeemer's Sacrifice, and by restricting the Universal Church of God within merely national frontiers. St. Paul did not really care how he was judged by a public opinion intent on any such purposes. "With me it is a very small thing that

[a] Gen. ix. 6. [b] St. Matt. xix. 9.

I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self."

III.

And this brings us to a third point. What was the consideration which sustained St. Paul in his felt opposition to the opinion of the Corinthian Christians? For, in such circumstances, even he would feel the need of a strong sustaining motive. Inspired Apostle as he was, he yet was subject to the usual conditions of human conduct. Infallible as a public teacher, he yet might in action, as did St. Peter at Antioch, make mistakes. What was it which upheld him when Corinth was saying that he was unfaithful; that there were other and greater Apostles whose conduct condemned him; that, in reality, he was far from being what his name and professions might suggest?

Let it be said once more; it is tolerably certain that a good man will always recognize in himself a difference from general opinion, whether civil or ecclesiastical, with reluctance. For he cannot but reflect that society, whether civil or sacred, is invigorated and supported by agreement in thought and feeling among its members; and, further, that agreement among men is, within limits, a presumption that those who agree are right. To a good man it can never be a pleasure to find that he differs with other people; because he knows that this difference means social and moral weakness, and that one of the parties who differ must be wrong. The Apostolic precepts about having an eye to the judgment even of the heathen world—"So much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men;"[a] "Provide things honest in the sight of all men;"[b] "Avoid even the appearance of evil"[c]—imply that, where no higher

[a] Rom. xii. 18. [b] *Ib.* 17. [c] 1 Thess. v. 22.

interests are compromised, a Christian will do his best to be and keep in harmony with the common opinion of his fellow-men, under whatever forms of association he may meet them.

But there are, of course, times and circumstances when such agreement is impossible. And this was St. Paul's case with respect to the Corinthian Church. He heard, as it were, though in a distant land, the hum of unfriendly voices which pronounced him a faithless steward of the mysteries of God; and he bade them defiance. Not in petulance or bitterness, not in contempt or scorn, not in sullen obstinacy or measured indignation, did the great Apostle utter the words, "With me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment." He spoke as from a higher atmosphere, beyond the reach of human assailants; he spoke from the vestibule of a Divine Presence-Chamber; he spoke, I might almost say, out of another world. He was, in spirit, with God. Prostrate before the All-Holy, he did not venture even to judge himself. He knew nothing against himself, so far as those matters were concerned which furnished the popular accusations at Corinth. But he did not feel that his ignorance was the certificate of his innocence. The All-Surveying Being before Whom his whole life lay, spread out like a river from its source down to the point at which it loses itself in the ocean, saw deeper, farther, more truly than he. In his own mysterious being there were hidden motives, unsuspected depths, which One Eye alone could fathom. "I know nothing against myself," he said; "yet am I not hereby justified: but He that judgeth me is the Lord." The All-Seeing was also the All-Merciful; and if there was that in His servant which provoked His displeasure, there was that in Himself which cancelled the provocation.

At least, God knew the purity of His Apostle's intentions, whatever might have been his failures in fact; and a sense of this Divine Judgment, always and unerringly forming itself in the Infinite Mind, made the Apostle feel not so much the pettiness as the waste and aimlessness of these human judgments which were formed and altered so constantly and confidently by the Christians of Corinth. He had prayed, we may be sure, "Enter not into judgment with Thy servant, O Lord; for in Thy Sight shall no man living be justified." [a] And he had known what it was to be "hidden privily in God's own Presence from the provoking of all men, and" to be "kept secretly in His Tabernacle from the strife of tongues." [b]

There can, I apprehend, be no doubt that any man who wishes to serve God must expect, sooner or later, to be judged hardly by the public opinion of his family, or of his circle of acquaintances, or of his town, or of his country, as the case may be. For to be loyal to so much moral truth as will keep society together is one thing, while to serve God is another. And as average public opinion crushes those whose criminal acts or words would, if they could, destroy society, so, on the other hand, it resents the higher lives of those who instead of being content with just so much truth and righteousness as is socially useful, desire to have as much of both as they can. So it has always been; human nature does not change. Noah in the antediluvian world; Lot in Sodom; Abraham in the distant East; Moses, whether at the court of Egypt, or in the camp of Israel; the great representative prophets, Isaiah and Jeremiah, under bad Jewish sovereigns; Ezekiel among impenitent captives; Daniel ministering before a heathen throne,—these and hundreds

[a] Ps. cxliii. 2. [b] *Ib.* xxxi. 22.

of others were condemned by the opinion of their contemporaries. Our Lord warned Christians that no change was to be expected; the old rule would obtain in the future even more decisively than in the past. "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated Me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you." [a] Thus the Apostle concludes that "Whoever would live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." [b] And thus it has been since.

The Apostles were at war with public opinion; they were told plainly that the cause they represented "was everywhere spoken against;" [c] they found as little sympathy among the cultivated sceptics who were then at the head of Jewish society as among the fanatical and ignorant populace at its base. And the history of all the martyrs is a history of conflict with public opinion pushed to the last extremity. The public opinion of the heathen empire killed criminals with one hand and saints with the other; for two centuries at least as much satisfaction was given by the death of a Christian Bishop or a Christian matron as by that of a rebel or a murderer. And even when the Roman Empire became Christian by profession, the old conflict continued in a different form; not now between Christians and heathens, but between downright Christians and Christians in name. And this has gone on ever since, down to our day. "As then, he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now." [d]

But before a man steels himself, after the Apostle's fashion, against the judgment of any section of his fellow-

[a] St. John xv. 18, 19. [b] 2 Tim. iii. 12.
[c] Acts xxviii. 22. [d] Gal. iv. 29.

men, he ought to be very sure of his ground. It is a bold, and in some respects a dangerous thing to say to a body of one's fellow-creatures, still more to a body of one's fellow-Christians, "With me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you." To say this out of bad humour, in a fit of impulse, or in a fit of obstinacy; to make a creed of a passing sentiment or prejudice, and a point of absolute morals out of a matter of fancy, and then, in this poor guise, to hold the language of an Apostolical combatant, is a folly which must lead to failure and confusion. And a man may defy the world, even in the name of Absolute Truth, without imitating St. Paul. He may hold Truth, not as God's Voice and gift, but as a personal prejudice of his own. He may think more of what is due to himself who holds, than to the Being Who gave it. He may hold it, not as a blessing for all whom it reaches, but as an intellectual weapon with which its servants may smite those who do not hold it. He may wrap himself in a shroud of self-complacency which thanks God that in this, as in other respects, he is not as other men are;[a] and, however accurate his hold on truth may be, he may only reproduce the temper, not of the Apostle who preached Christ, but of the Pharisee who rejected Him.

But when it is once clear in conscience that opposition to dominant opinion is necessary, there is every reason for determined perseverance. On the one side is human weakness; on the other, the Strength of God. On the one, human error; on the other, the Truth that cannot lie. On the one, the Prince of Martyrs, Who, faint and bleeding, has just proclaimed, "To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth;"[b] on the other,

[a] St. Luke xviii. 11. [b] St. John xviii. 37.

the multitude crying out more exceedingly, "Crucify Him, crucify Him."[a] To give way before the threat or the frown which represents nothing that a man in his heart respects, is to be a slave and a coward. Just so far as a man is loyal to known Truth and known duty, does he assert his manhood; and, not in petulance, not in scorn, not in indifference, not in anger, he is thereby raised, though it be on a cross, high above the opinion of the world. It is a small thing that he is judged unfavourably by it; because, in a higher Presence, he dares not judge himself at all, and yet he believes his intentions to be accepted by the Justice and the Charity of God.

IV.

St. Paul's words might be the guide of two classes of persons, and the motto of a third. They should guide living men who, at all costs, are loyal to truth; or who do their duty under circumstances of discouragement. They may well express the mind of the holy dead.

The martyr has been mentioned. But take the not uncommon instance of a public man who is convinced that a particular line of conduct and legislation is for the true interests of his country. He hopes that his countrymen will gradually learn to share his convictions. But he is disappointed. His hold upon the public becomes weaker and weaker; the judgments which are formed of him become more and more unfavourable; possibly, more and more unjust. Power is slipping from his grasp; before him is obscurity, perhaps disgrace. There are documents in existence, it may be, which, if they could be published, would at once restore the confidence which

[a] St. John xix. 6, 15.

he is losing; but then, for reasons of public policy, they cannot be published for fifty years; they will only vindicate his memory two generations hence. He whispers to himself for a moment with the poet of the Greek Games, "The days which come after are the wisest witnesses,"[a] and yet he checks himself. No, they are not the wisest; there is a Present Living Witness of his intentions with Whom he has already pleaded his cause, and won it; One Who, hereafter, "will make his righteousness as clear as the light, and his just dealing as the noon-day;"[b] and in the strength of this profound conviction—"He that judgeth me is the Lord"—as he passes from the public scene, such a man looks out upon the nation which is condemning him, to cry with the Apostle, and in his spirit, "With me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment."

If the words may thus express intrepid devotion to any kind of known truth, they are equally the language of devotion to known duty. Look at that young man who, at the age of seventeen or eighteen, has just come up to London to begin life. He has left a simple country home, where settled habits and warm-hearted friends made the path of duty and virtue easy and welcome. He finds himself in one of those vast establishments which are the symbol and pride of our commercial enterprise as a people, and many of which may be visited within a few hundred yards of the walls of this Cathedral. He finds himself among some three hundred or four hundred companions of his own age; he is the member of a society complete in itself, with a public opinion of its own, an opinion to which generations of his prede-

[a] Pindar, *Ol.*, i. 33, ἀμέραι δ' ἐπίλοιποι μάρτυρες σοφώτατοι.

[b] Ps. xxxvii. 6.

cessors have contributed. What does that opinion recommend? What does it sanction? What does it condemn? If he is going to cling unflinchingly to what he knows to be right; if he is going to resist manfully what he knows to be wrong; if he is going to lead, by God's grace, a true and pure life; to continue to say his prayers, to read his Bible, to attend Church worship, let us hope, to communicate, as heretofore—he will have to reckon, sooner or later, with that opinion. Many a young man would go bravely through the fire who cannot stand ridicule; and ridicule is the weapon by which a narrow and rude public opinion implacably asserts, or tries to assert, its empire. Sooner or later that young man will have to say, "With me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment." Let him remember that there are two spirits in which those words may be uttered: the spirit of the Pharisee, and the spirit of the Christian—the spirit of St. Paul. Let him remember that God does judge him. He cannot say with the Apostle, "I know nothing against myself;" but he can, with the Apostle, hide himself from the hard words and looks of men in the Infinite Patience and Charity of God, his true and rightful Judge, his most assured Friend, if only he be faithful.

And these words are a motto for the dead. That first sentence, "With me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment," might fittingly be traced on a Christian tombstone. There is an old proverb, "De mortuis nil nisi bonum," "Don't let us say anything hard of the dead." It is not, I fear, much in favour now. Too often a man's death unchains tongues which would not have dared, during his lifetime, to say anything in his dispraise; and after the usual

conventionalisms have been wreathed around his coffin, there is a pause—and lo! his memory becomes the object of passionate invective. Still, I repeat it, let us not say hard things about the dead. Why not? Not because we know not whether the dead may not hear what we say, for we ought to be willing to say into a man's ear what we say of him when he is out of earshot; but because the dead have been already judged at an unerring tribunal, and it is not for us either to revise or to ratify the sentence of God. They have already, immediately after death, passed to the foot of the Eternal Throne; they have learnt what awaits them at the General Judgment. To them the guesswork of human judgments, be they good or bad, must appear to be unspeakably trifling; for they have felt what it is to be face to face with the awful Infallibility of the Eternal Judge. What matters it to them how the consent of human criticism deals with their acts and words, the memory of which yet lingers for a year or two on the little planet which they have left? Those very words and acts have been passed in review by the Omniscient; while they themselves have taken refuge in the Hope set before them by His Atoning Love. Surely with them it is a very small thing now that they should be judged of any human judgment. They judge not their own selves; they know much against themselves. But herein alone are they justified, that He Who judges them is their Redeemer as well as their Lord.

Brethren, two judgments about us are always being formed—the human, and the Divine. Let us not ignore man's judgment; but let us never fear, let us never flatter it. Not to be needlessly at issue with it, is surely our happiness as well as our duty. But if it may be sometimes right, it is, on the gravest subjects, more

likely to be mistaken. There is another Judgment, which is never capricious and never deceived; the Judgment of that All-Surveying Being "unto Whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from Whom no secrets are hid." He judges us now; but we also "believe that He shall come to be our Judge." Let us, while we may, take refuge from His Justice in the depths—the exhaustless depths—of His Mercy. Let us pray Him so to help His servants whom He has redeemed with His Precious Blood, as to make them to be numbered with His Saints in glory everlasting.

SERMON XVII.

JOY IN THE LORD.

(FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT.)

PHIL. IV. 4:

Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice.

OF all the Epistles of St. Paul, that to the Philippians is the brightest. It was, indeed, written out of a Roman prison, and it touches upon some depressing subjects. Such were the recent illness of Epaphroditus,[a] the disagreement between the two ladies, Euodias and Syntyche,[b] the want of disinterestedness in those about the Apostle, when Christ was preached in Rome by some of the missionaries, "even of envy and strife;"[c] not to speak of the personal discomfort which was inseparable from his own circumstances. Yet, such was the happy state of the Philippian Church that, alone among St. Paul's Epistles, this contains no word of censure for those to whom it is addressed. And throughout it there is an undercurrent of buoyant thankfulness and hope, which from time to time bursts upwards in such exclamations as that of the text: "Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice." St. Paul had already written, "Finally, my

[a] Phil. ii. 25-27. [b] *Ib.* iv. 2. [c] *Ib.* i. 15.

brethren, rejoice in the Lord."[a] But, as if this was not enough, he repeats the precept, "Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice." Thus this Epistle has had a particular attraction for Christians who have severely felt the pressure whether of duty or of sorrow; and among these may be mentioned one, who was a great student of Holy Scripture in its practical aspects—the late Bishop of Salisbury, Dr. Hamilton. He used to say that when he felt depressed and discouraged, he commonly read the Epistle to the Philippians through, as soon as he could make time to do it; for in this letter of the great Apostle, more than anywhere else, he found the sustaining force and motives which helped him on his way.

And it is not hard to see why this passage of the Epistle has its place in the services of the Last Sunday in Advent. We are now very near the Great Festival of the Birth of Christ. We are pausing as pilgrims have described themselves as pausing on the hills near Jerusalem, to prepare for their entrance into the Holy City. We are waiting for the sunrise, and already the horizon is brightening with the splendour that precedes the sun. Christmas, though not the greatest of the Christian Festivals, is yet scarcely inferior to Easter, while the custom of Western Christendom, and of our own country in particular, has made it even more joyous. Not merely is the season dear to every Christian heart that knows something of the lovingkindness of God, as shown by sending His Divine Son into our human world; but all lawful human joys, all family relationships, all that brings light and sweetness into our natural life, finds shelter, sanction, consecration, in the Stable at Bethlehem. Joy, in short, is the keynote of the Festival of Christmas. And therefore, in immediate preparation for it, the Last

[a] Phil. iii. 1.

Sunday in Advent heralds this joy, but, at the same time, insists upon its true source and motive, and undertakes to regulate as well as to stimulate it. "Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice."

My brethren, all the emotions and passions of the human soul find their most legitimate exercise and their complete satisfaction in the service of God. Bishop Butler, in a famous sermon, has shown that this is true even of anger or resentment.[a] Anger is so almost invariably roused for selfish or sinful purposes, that we are apt to regard any exercise of it as wrong, and to forget that God gave it us to be employed in His service and for His glory. There are certain actions which ought to make us angry. One of the darkest touches which the Psalmist throws into the character of a bad man is, that "neither doth he abhor anything that is evil;"[b] one of the most urgent of the Apostolic precepts to Christians is, "Be ye angry, and sin not."[c] In the same way, wonder, awe, gratitude, affectionateness, and the like, though they are often roused by very unworthy objects, have each of them one legitimate object in which they find their perfect satisfaction. They are perfectly satisfied in Almighty God; and they do not find satisfaction, except of an imperfect and unsubstantial kind, anywhere beneath His Throne. For God has made the human soul, and every faculty or instinct that composes it, for Himself. He is the key that can unlock its mysterious powers, and discover their true range and capacity. And as this is the case with other emotions and passions and faculties, so it is with the emotion of joy.

Joy is that active sense of happiness which caresses the object that provokes it, and seeks some outlet or expression for its buoyancy; and it has an immense

[a] *Works*, ii. 97, *sqq.* [b] Ps. xxxvi. 4. [c] Eph. iv. 26.

field of modified exercise in the sphere of sense and time. Scripture in many ways recognizes this. "To the counsellors of peace is joy."[a] "It is joy to the just to do judgment."[b] "A man hath joy by the answer of his mouth."[c] The virgin, in Jeremiah, rejoices in the dance.[d] Isaiah speaks of the joy of harvest, and of the rejoicing of men after victory who divide the spoil.[e] Solomon observes that even "folly is joy to him that is destitute of wisdom;"[f] and St. James knew some Christians who rejoiced in their boastings, while he adds tersely, "all such rejoicing is evil."[g] The range of joy is almost as wide as that of human thought and enterprise; but its complete satisfaction is only in God. God is the "exceeding joy"[h] of the Psalmist; God is the One Object Who can draw out and give play to the soul's capacity for active happiness; and therefore, before God, the Psalmist's heart danceth for joy,[i] and his mouth praiseth God with joyful lips;[k] and he bids the children of Zion be joyful in their King;[l] and he looks out upon heathendom, and would have all the lands come before the Lord's Presence with a song;[m] and he looks out upon Nature, and bids the field be joyful, and all that is in it, and the trees of the wood rejoice before the Lord;[n] and the floods clap their hands, and the hills be joyful together before the Lord.[o] This is the language of exuberant delight; and St. Paul only adopts the expression of the Psalmist, of Isaiah, of Joel, of Habakkuk, of Zechariah, when he bids the Philippians "Rejoice in the Lord."

[a] Prov. xii. 20. [b] *Ib.* xxi. 15. [c] *Ib.* xv. 23.
[d] Jer. xxxi. 13. [e] Isa. ix. 3. [f] Prov. xv. 21.
[g] St. James iv. 16. [h] Ps. xliii. 4. [i] *Ib.* xxviii. 8.
[k] *Ib.* lxiii. 6. [l] *Ib.* cxlix. 2. [m] *Ib.* c. 1.
[n] *Ib.* xcvi. 12. [o] *Ib.* xcviii. 9.

I.

Now, this joy is, first of all, intellectual. The human reason has its profound satisfactions, its ecstasies, its moments of bounding, inexpressible delight. "Why do you sit up so late at night?" was a question once put to an eminent mathematician. "To enjoy myself," was the reply. "How?" was the rejoinder. "I thought you did nothing but spend the whole night in working out mathematical problems." "So I do," was the reply. "In the working out these problems consists the enjoyment. Depend upon it," he added, "those persons lose a form of enjoyment too keen and sweet to be described who do not know what it is to recognize at last, after long effort and various failures, the true relation between abstract mathematical formulas." Well, my brethren, that is probably a form of enjoyment to which you and I are strangers; and yet we may know enough of other subjects to believe in its reality. In different degrees, all real knowledge is delightful to the human mind, and for the reason which makes pure mathematics so peculiarly delightful; the delight is caused by contact with fact, with truth. Why is this contact so welcome to the mind of man? Because the mind is made for God, the Truth of all truths, the One Supreme Fact, the Absolute Being, Who is the meeting-point of all that really is; in Whom, as manifested in His Word or Son, are "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."[a]

In our day, this delight of the human mind in coming into contact with fact is especially observable in those who study the physical sciences. The scientific spirit, as it is called, is at present concentrated on these studies with

[a] Col. ii. 3.

passionate eagerness. And in themselves they are deserving of a warm welcome from Christians. For if Revelation is God's Second Book, Nature is His First. Nature, according to the Apostle, is the book which God opened before the eyes of the heathen world. And men were not meant to learn His Existence by a laborious process of argument and inference, but to read, stamped on Nature's every page, His Being, His Power, His Beauty, the Resource and many-sidedness of His Life. "The invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made."[a] If this wonderful lesson is so often missed; if a film would sometimes seem to be drawn over the eyes which see deepest into the processes of Nature, so that the Hand Which is everywhere behind her, or rather, ever moving on her surface, is unnoticed, this does not show that their study in itself is bad. It shows that some inward disability prevents their making the most of it. The student of Nature, whether he knows it or not, is animated by that love of contact with truth which makes knowledge of the Highest Truth a source of the highest and purest enjoyment. If this be so, if the contact of the mind with any kind of reality has a charm all its own, what should not be the delight of steadily contemplating God as He presents Himself in Revelation? In Revelation, the Being, the Perfection, the Life of God, are spread out before us like an illimitable ocean, that we may rejoice in Him alway as the only and perfect satisfaction of our intellectual nature. This Being of beings, to Whom nothing can be added, because nothing is wanting; Whom no place, nor time, nor will, nor intelligence can contain; Who fills, penetrates, transcends all created things, Himself uncir-

[a] Rom. i. 20.

cumscribed and unbounded Life; — This Being, upon Whose Nature the shadow of change never rests; Whose Essence, Thought, Heart, Will, Working, are alike unchanging and unchangeable;—This Being, Who never began and will never cease to be; Whose existence knows no succession, no division of time, but includes in one single point of an indivisible Eternity the duration and the divisions that belong to time, so that with Him each moment is as eternity, and eternity as a moment;—This Being, Whose Power is limited only by His own Moral Nature; Who knows not what we men name infirmity or fatigue; Who has created this universe out of nothing, and could with equal readiness resolve it into the nothing out of which He has taken it, since He momentarily upholds it in the existence which He has bestowed;—This unbounded, vast Intelligence, in Which darkness and ignorance can find no place, Which can never err, never be deceived; before Which all that is, is spread out in its widest extent and in its minutest detail; all things and occurrences, whether past, or present, or to come; all that is possible, and all that is imaginable; all that is not, yet might be, as well as all that is;—This awful Will, perfect in Its power, in Its freedom, in Its sanctity, Which ever wills and loves the good, because the good is Its nature; and that so perfectly that the presence of evil in the world is but a weird product of Its love of the moral freedom wherein the excellence of the rational creature consists;—This awful Will, Which is ever the same in Its principle and Its direction, yet Which, as It deals with us men, we name by turns Justice or Mercy, but always Goodness;—surely here is a Being, in contemplating Whom the intelligence of man might well rejoice. Nor is this all. He has not merely revealed Himself as an All-embracing Intelligence and a perfectly

Holy Will. "My reason tells me," it was once said, "that before He created anything, the Maker of this Universe must have dwelt in eternal solitude; but my experience shows me that—at least, for a created being—solitude must mean madness; the mind cannot, dare not, beyond a certain point, feed only on itself." Here, as man gazes at what to him is unintelligible, God again lifts the veil, and discovers in that Solitary Existence Which preceded creation the activities of an Infinite Life, when It had not passed by creation beyond the circuit of Its own being. Not alone, as we men think of solitude, but as Three in the Unity of His Self-existing Being, God existed, exists, will exist for ever. Long ere He created—to use poor human words—God was, as He is, and ever will be; the Centre and Sphere of an unbegun, unending productiveness. As "in the beginning" was God,[a] so "in the beginning was the Word."[b] A plant slowly develops itself, till it bears its flower and its fruit; man passes the long years of boyhood and of youth ere he becomes a parent; but God, the Everlasting Being, ever begets within Himself an Everlasting Word or Son, and from Son and Father there is everlastingly breathed forth the Spirit, the Bond of Love That unites Them. This generation of the Son, this going forth of the Spirit from the Father and the Son, always has been, is at this moment, ever will be. This never-begun, never-ending activity within the Divine Being never impairs His Unity; the same undivided Nature belongs to Father, Son, and Spirit; They exist, Each possessing without dividing, a common uncreated Essence. Each contains the Others; Each is in the Others, so that there is perfect Unity. And yet this Unity is not a barren solitude; for within it subsist, in Eternal companionship, without being separated,

[a] Gen. i. 1. [b] St. John i. 1.

without being confined, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

Alas! how can a few human words trace the distant outline, the remote frontier, of the greatest subject that can present itself to the intelligence of man—the Being of the Everlasting God? And yet a new plant flowering in your botanical gardens, a newly discovered animal secured for your menageries, a sea-fish or octopus in your aquariums, will send a thrill of interest through those sections of society which claim to represent the most active thought of the day. But all the while the Being of beings, with all the magnificent array of His attractive and awful Attributes, is above you, around you, ay, within you. How much of that mental life, which you bestow so ungrudgingly on His creatures, is given to Him? Surely that is a question which greatly concerns not a few of us at the present time. As we give our time and strength to art, to science, to politics; as the hours which are allotted us are passed almost exclusively in dealing with topics and publications of the day, which have little or no reference to the One Absolute and Eternal Being, do we not hear the Apostle paraphrasing his own words: "O intelligence of man, that wast made for something higher than any created thing, understand at last thy true, thy magnificent destiny; 'Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice'"?

II.

This joy in the Lord is, secondly and pre-eminently, moral. It is the active satisfaction experienced by a created moral nature at coming into contact with the Uncreated and Perfect Moral Being. For God, we know, is not merely the Self-existing; He is not merely

boundless Intelligence and resistless Force; He is, as we have already said, Sanctity, Justice, Goodness, Mercy. And thus He appeals to another side of man's nature than the reason; He is, to use an expression of the Psalmist, "the Joy of the heart."[a]

Now, the emotion which we commonly mean by joy has much more to do with our affections than with our reason. It is in the play of the affections upon an object which satisfies and responds to them that most men ordinarily feel joy. Thus, among things here below, a man's family, his wife and his children, call out and sustain this bounding sense of delight which the ordinary occupations of his understanding do but rarely stimulate. When his wife welcomes him as he returns from his work with a bright smile of tender attachment; when his child smiles half unconsciously from its cradle at hearing its father's voice, a man feels a profound emotion, which ministers to his inmost being the truest and deepest satisfaction. This, he says to himself, is real joy; this is nature. Ay, it is nature; but it is something more. Little as he may think it, on that threshold, beside that cradle, he stands face to face with the attributes of the Everlasting Being, Who has thus infused His Tenderness and His Love into the works of His Hands. What is here but the shadow or fringe of that Eternal Kindliness Which in Itself knows no stinted measure nor bounded form; Which depends on no other; Which embraces all other forms of excellence, blessedness, perfection; Which ministers out of Its exhaustless resources to all things tender their tenderness, to all things bright their splendour, to all things perfect their perfection; Which is the Sun of all moral beings, around Which they move, by Which they are sustained, in Which they rest, as the

[a] Ps. cxix. 111.

End and Object Which alone satisfies their desire, their appetite, their movement, their life?

Certainly, God's attributes of Holiness, Justice, Mercy, may well delight the human mind as illustrating His Perfection, not less than do those other attributes we have been considering. But they have also a very direct bearing on our moral nature. As we gaze on Him Who is thus Holy, Just, Tender, True, we involuntarily turn an eye upon ourselves. If He is "of purer eyes than to behold iniquity,"[a] what does He see in us? If He is Righteous in Himself, and true in His Judgments, what must we sinners expect? If, indeed, we could contemplate His Being only as an abstract problem, we might still find satisfaction in it; but how is this satisfaction possible when these His characteristic Attributes have so close and so stern a message for ourselves? It was not ever thus—that were a libel on His goodness. But between that Uncreated Beauty and our poor enfeebled life a dark shadow has passed; and yet light enough is left to enable us to see how little we are like Him.

No, my brethren, joy in a perfectly holy being is impossible while man is as his first father left him; a fallen being, with a fatal inclination to evil. Conscious of this radical flaw, man, from generation to generation, like his first parent, hides himself from the Lord God among the trees of the garden of life.[b] He not merely feels his insignificance; he sees that his nature is warped and degraded; a deep gloom takes possession of him when he thinks steadily on the Eternal and the Unseen; when he turns his face towards the God Who made him. He would fain bury himself in amusement, in work, in self-forgetfulness; he must get out of the sight of God.

And not the least gracious work of our Lord and Saviour

[a] Hab. i. 13. [b] Gen. iii. 8.

Jesus Christ is this: that He has made it again possible for man to rejoice in God; in His Justice and Sanctity, not less than in His mercy; in His Justice and Sanctity, not less than in those other aspects by which He touches the reason rather than the conscience of His creatures. For our Lord has, in His own Person, destroyed this discord between the conscience of man and the Holiness of God. He, representing our whole race, has offered to God a Life of perfect obedience, ending in a Death which expressed absolute submission of the human to the Divine Will; and this His Death, being the Death of the Only Begotten, had a value transcending all earthly estimate. Thenceforward all who will may unite themselves by faith to the Perfect Moral Being Who has appeared on earth, Our Lord Jesus Christ; and since true faith eagerly seeks and accepts what He has to bestow, from the channels through which He bestows it, His grace establishes an intimate union between the believing soul and its Object; an union so intimate that, in the sight of the All-Holy, they form but one moral Person. "We are members of His Body, of His Flesh, and of His Bones."[a] "We are accepted in the Beloved."[b] "He made Him to be sin for us, Who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him."[c] Read the great passage in which St. Paul enumerates the consequences within the soul of the new relation towards God which is established by the Atoning Work of Jesus Christ.[d] The first is peace. "Having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Then, as the soul finds what it is to have entered the state of grace, "this grace wherein we stand," comes joy. We "rejoice in the hope of the glory of God." As joy is one of the first experiences, so it is the crowning gift of this new life in the

[a] Eph. v. 30. [b] *Ib.* i. 6. [c] 2 Cor. v. 21. [d] Rom. v. 1–11.

soul of man. Not only, says the Apostle, being reconciled, shall we be saved by Christ's Life, "but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by Whom we have now received the Atonement."[a] The old fear, which skulks away from the Sanctity and Justice of the All-Seeing and the All-Powerful, is gone. Clinging to the Cross of Jesus, we look into the Face of the Everlasting Father. "With joy we draw water out of the wells of Salvation;"[b] out of the Wounds of the Crucified, out of the Sacraments of the Church; and, in blissful anticipation of eternity, we cry, "Thou shalt make me full of joy with Thy Countenance."[c]

May we not again hear the Apostle paraphrasing his words? "Rejoice, O heart of man; not in any of those passing forms of beauty which would fain exhaust thy enthusiasm in this earthly scene, since thou art capable of a higher and nobler joy than this. Rejoice in the Uncreated and Eternal Beauty; rejoice in God. Not only as He presents Himself to thy gaze in the Everlasting Attributes; but as, bending to thy weakness and thy need, He takes a Form of flesh and blood, and would win thee by sharing the nature that is thine. Rejoice in Jesus. Rejoice in His pre-existent glories; rejoice in His Birth, His Temptation, His Example, His Miracles, His Teaching, His Passion, His Death, His Resurrection, His Ascension, His Perpetual Intercession, His Covenanted Presence with His people until the end. All this is but one long and varied effort on thy behalf of the Eternal Mercy Which has a first claim on thee, Which never has left thee to thyself, Which seeks the homage of thy joy, not for His own sake only, but for thine. 'Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice.'"

[a] Rom. v. 11. [b] Isa. xii. 3. [c] Acts ii. 28.

III.

In conclusion, note four practical points.

1. Our power of rejoicing in the Lord is a fair test of our moral and spiritual condition. St. Peter describes Christians as men who, though they see not the Lord Jesus Christ, yet believing on Him, rejoice with joy unspeakable.[a] How, indeed, if we think of Him as He is, can it be otherwise? How can we reflect that those Eternal Years, that lowly Incarnation, that spotless Character, that Cross of triumphant shame, that open grave, and that unceasing Intercession, all are ours; and yet not rejoice in Him Whom we thus possess? The heart which does not "break forth into joy"[b] at the mention of His Name, at the sound of His Word, at the sense of His near Presence, is surely, for spiritual purposes, paralyzed or dead. If earthly pleasures, friends, literature, employments, objects of art, or beauties of nature rouse in us keen sensations of delight, and this Name which is above every name, this language which is unlike any human speech, this Love which transcends all earthly affection, finds and leaves us cold, languid, unconcerned; be sure that it cannot be well with us. There is something wrong in our moral being, ay, in its secret depths; the soul, in a state of grace, must answer at a bound to the Voice and Touch of its Redeeming Lord.

2. This habit of rejoicing in our Lord is a Christian's main support under the trials of life. Sooner or later those trials must come to all of us; and whether they shall sweep the soul along with them down the torrent of despair, depends upon whether the soul has or has not learnt to rejoice in an Unchanging Object Who does not

[a] 1 St. Pet. i. 8. [b] Isa. lii. 9.

depend on them. David's exclamation, "Thou hast set my feet upon the Rock,"[a] means that he was thus resting on One Who does not change with the things of time; and St. Paul, after saying of himself, "We rejoice in hope of the glory of God," adds, "and not only so, but we glory in tribulation."[b] So he describes himself to the Corinthians as "exceeding joyful in all our tribulations."[c] He prays that the Colossians may be "strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, unto all patience and long-suffering with joyfulness."[d] The Hebrew Christians are congratulated for that "they took joyfully the spoiling of their goods,"[e] and St. James bids Christians count it all joy when they fall into divers trials.[f] The explanation of all such language is, that whatever is outward and transient is easily put up with, when the soul has secured that which is inward and imperishable; delight in the thought and Presence of God. "Heaviness may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning."[g] "He that now goeth on his way weeping, and beareth forth good seed, shall doubtless come again with joy, and bring his sheaves with him."[h] Nay, he has already the joy of Christ fulfilled in himself. A Christian may say with Habakkuk, and in a deeper sense, "Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the field, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet will I rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation."[i]

3. And thus this power of rejoicing in our Lord is one of the great motive forces of the Christian life. Within

[a] Ps. xl. 2. [b] Rom. v. 2, 3 [c] 2 Cor. vii. 4.
[d] Col. i. 11. [e] Heb. x. 34, [f] St. James i. 2.
[g] Ps. xxx. 5, [h] *Ib.* cxxvi. [i] Hab. iii. 17, 18.

the regenerate soul it is, in our Lord's words, as "a well of water springing up unto everlasting life."[a] It fertilizes thought, feeling, resolution, worship; it gives a new spring and impulse to what before was passive or well-nigh dead; it makes outward efforts and inward graces possible which else had been undreamt of. Thus St. Paul, speaking of the Macedonian Christians, says that "the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality."[b] Thus he prays God to fill the Roman Christians "with all joy and peace in believing," that they "may abound in hope."[c] In fact, joy is enthusiasm; and enthusiasm is a great motive force, which carries men out of themselves, and makes them able to do and suffer much which is beyond their natural strength. This was why St. Stephen's face at his trial looked like the face of an angel.[d] That Divine Saviour Whom he had found and preached enabled this young Deacon to confront his judges, not in a spirit of fierce defiance, but of strong placid joy which gave him words to speak, and endurance to suffer, and, withal, a brightness of countenance which provoked the wonder of his persecutors.

4. And thus, lastly, this joy in the Lord should diffuse itself over the whole of a Christian's life. A man's look, his manner, his work, his worship, should, if possible, all be cheerful. A Christian in a state of grace has a right, as no other man has a right, to be in high spirits. Nowhere does the New Testament imply that there is a special sort of spirituality in moroseness and gloom; and gloom is least appropriate in those solemn duties which, more than any other, express our relations to and feelings towards the Source of our joy. The brighter public

[a] St. John iv. 14. [b] 2 Cor. viii. 2.
[c] Rom. xv. 13. [d] Acts vi. 15.

worship can be, the more Christian it is. What else do we mean by saying, as we do, deliberately over and over again, "My mouth shall praise Thee with joyful lips;"[a] "Make a cheerful noise unto the God of Jacob;"[b] "O come, let us sing unto the Lord: let us heartily rejoice in the strength of our salvation;"[c] "Let the children of Sion be joyful in their King;"[d] "Let the saints be joyful in glory; let them rejoice in their beds;"[e] "I will go unto the altar of God, even unto the God of my joy and gladness: and upon the harp will I give thanks unto Thee, O God my God"?[f] The Psalms are full of this language. What does it mean, but that the worship no less than the life of those who use it should be uniformly joyous?

Pray then, brethren, for this great grace, before the Christmas Festival is upon us. Pray that, through God's pardoning mercy in Christ, you may have a right to it. It is the gift of the Holy Spirit; ask Him for it. The first works of the Spirit, says the Apostle, are love and joy.[g] "Righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost;"[h] this is the Kingdom of God within the soul of man. This great grace will not be refused us if we ask for it; we shall experience, not a passing convulsion—spasmodic, unseemly, boisterous; but a tranquil, yet strong emotion, which like a river, bearing the soul upon its surface, sparkles brightly as the beams of the Sun of Righteousness fall upon it, while slowly, but surely, it pursues its way towards the ocean of Eternity. For there is the end. There, at the last, in His Presence is the fulness of joy; and at His Right Hand are pleasures for evermore.[i]

[a] Ps. lxiii. 6. [b] *Ib.* lxxxi. 1. [c] *Ib.* xcv. 1. [d] *Ib.* cxlix. 2.
[e] *Ib.* 5. [f] *Ib.* xliii. 4. [g] Gal. v. 22. [h] Rom. xiv. 17.
[i] Ps. xvi. 12.

SERMON XVIII.

DELAY OF CHRIST'S SECOND COMING.

(FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT.)

2 St. Pet. iii. 4.

Where is the promise of His coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.

THIS question, I need hardly say, is not asked by St. Peter himself. He is describing what would be said and thought in after years about our Lord Jesus Christ's Second Coming. Not in the last days of the world only, but at the end of the age of the Apostles and under their eyes, men would be found asking whether it was to be supposed that Christ would keep His Promise of coming to Judgment. "There shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of His coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation."[a] Thus St. Peter describes what would be thought and said; and he provides an answer which we now have to consider.

Now, on most of those days of the Christian Year in which we do especial honour to the Person or work of our

[a] 2 St. Pet. iii. 3, 4.

Lord Jesus Christ, we look backwards into the ages that are past and gone. This is the case on the days which are consecrated to the great acts whereby the Everlasting Son of God wrought out the Redemption of us lost men. Christ's Incarnation, His Birth, His Circumcision, the manifestation of His Presence to the heathen world, His bitter Passion and Death, His glorious Resurrection and Ascension, are all of them past events. They have a present and enduring force and virtue for the Church and for souls; from what Christ has been and has done in time, we learn what He is and is doing now. But to-day we forget the past; we almost forget the present; we strain our eyes that we may see as far as may be into the coming time; we look forward. Before us is an event, certain to happen, and inconceivably solemn, magnificent, terrible; the Coming of Christ to Judgment. It is the last scene of His relation to the world; but it is just as necessary as were His Birth, His Death, His Resurrection, His Ascension into Heaven. The main difference is, that these acts of His are far behind us in the centuries which passed before we were born, while He yet has to come to Judgment.

I.

In the first days of the Christian Church men gave a large part of their thoughts to Christ's Second Coming. They were constantly looking out for it. Our Lord had said a great deal about it just before His Death; and when He had risen from the dead and had left the world, it was natural to think over, and record all that could be recalled of His words. Hence such chapters—alone in their solemnity and awe, even in the Gospels—as the twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth of St. Matthew. Those

mysterious sayings, those awakening warnings, those awe-inspiring descriptions, were constantly in the hearts and on the lips of the earliest Christians; and the two letters to the Thessalonians, the earliest which St. Paul wrote to a Christian Church, are full of the subject of the Second Coming. Indeed, the Thessalonians appear at one time to have been so engrossed with this prospect, as to lose sight of the claims of daily duty; and the Apostle's main reason for writing his Second Letter to that Church is to correct this serious mistake. Christ, he says, will not come immediately;[a] many things must happen first, such as an apostasy from the Faith,[b] and the appearance of a person called the Antichrist.[c] Meanwhile Christians must cultivate "a patient waiting for Christ;"[d] they must "work with quietness, and eat their own bread;"[e] they "must not be weary of well-doing,"[f] only because all that they do is so insignificant when compared with all that they expect.

But the years passed. First one Apostle went to his rest and then another, and the Church came to contain numbers of men and women who had not seen an Apostle's face at all. Christians still got up in the morning, thinking that Christ might come before sunset; they still lay down at night, with the thought that before daybreak they might be summoned by the Archangel to meet Him. But this expectation would naturally have been less vivid and intense with the second generation of Christians than it had been with the first; and again, less with the third generation than with the second. Many of the first Christians had seen the Risen Christ with their bodily eyes; those who succeeded at least knew how deep was the impression which such a sight had made on the beholders.

[a] 2 Thess. ii. 2. [b] *Ib.* 3. [c] *Ib.* 8–10.
[d] *Ib.* iii. 5. [e] *Ib.* 12. [f] *Ib.* 13.

He Who had revisited the world so quickly from His Tomb might well be looked for, after no long interval, from His Throne in Heaven. But the years passed, and He did not come. And thus this piece of the revealed Will of God gradually occupied less of their attention; it had less place in their hearts and thoughts than formerly. In truth, as time went on and Christ did not come, His Coming seemed less imminent; and thus Christians thought and said less about it.

Not that any true Christian ever ceased to believe that Christ would come; to a true faith the very thought is blasphemy. For He, our Lord, has said, again and again, that He will come when men do not look for Him, "as a thief in the night;"[a] with imperious swiftness, "as the lightning shineth from the east unto the west;"[b] with majesty awful, immeasurable, "in His glory, and all His Holy Angels with Him.[c] From the first till now the Church has confessed that her Divine Lord "sitteth on the Right Hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead." But this conviction, always strong, retired into the background, like the memory of one whom we have loved better than any else on earth, but who has now been dead for a great many years. And yet at any moment such a conviction would flash up into its full activity to welcome its Lord and King, coming from Heaven in His glory, on His errand of Mercy and Justice.

II.

This is what went on in believing souls; but in those days, as in these, other persons besides genuine believers

[a] St. Matt. xxiv. 43, 44; 2 St. Pet. iii. 10. [b] St. Matt. xxiv. 27.
[c] *Ib.* xxv. 31.

interested themselves in religious questions. St. Peter saw the beginning of it; he knew what would happen a few years after his death. "There shall come in the last times scoffers, . . . saying, Where is the promise of His coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation." Here we have the language of those moods of the human soul which lead to entire rejection of the Second Coming of our Lord.

"Where is the promise of His coming?" See here, first, the language of natural impatience. The one thing with which many a man cannot put up is to be kept waiting. He gets angry with Almighty God when a truth is not immediately verified, when a grace is not instantaneously given, when a promise is not kept without delay. He gets angry with God, just as he would with an inconsiderate servant who kept him standing at the door of his house, exposed to the wind and the rain, instead of hastening to open it immediately. This was the temper of some souls at the close of the Apostolic age. They had fled for refuge from the storms of heathen life, from falling fortunes, from blighted hopes, to lay hold on the hope set before them. They wanted to see, with their bodily eyes, the Object of their hope as soon as possible. Years had passed since the Ascension of Christ, yet He had not come to Judgment. The Apostles, those first Fathers in the Faith, had mostly fallen asleep, yet Christ had not come to Judgment. The first generation of believers, then the second, then, perhaps, the third, had passed away, yet Christ had not come to Judgment. Why this delay? Why this protracted expectation? Why these disappointed hopes? Was He coming at all? Why should men still wait for that

which they had expected so earnestly, so long? Why hope against hope for a fulfilment of the promise of His Coming?

"Where is the promise of His coming?" Here, secondly, we have the language of incipient disbelief in a supernatural event yet to come. I say, yet to come. It is easier to believe that something above Nature has taken place in a distant past than that it is taking place now, or that it will do so in a future which may be close at hand. Many men believe the truth of miracles eighteen hundred years ago, who would not have believed in them at the time, and who would not believe in the same miracles, with the same evidence in their favour, now. This is not reasonable, certainly; but it is common. Men tacitly assume that much was possible in the past which is not possible now: modern life, they say, has somehow dismissed miracle, but there was plenty of room for it in bygone times. To minds of this kind the idea of Christ coming in the clouds of Heaven to Judgment, "so coming as His Apostles saw Him go up into Heaven,"[a] is something more than unwelcome. It offends their established way of looking at things; it confuses the past, as they think of it, with the present and the future; it puts them in the difficulty of having to expect a kind of event which they had accustomed themselves to think of as belonging only to other lands, and other times, and other races of men than their own. The promise of Christ's coming seems to be in conflict with the idea that the supernatural has passed away for good, and that henceforth only such events as can be brought within that circle of causes which we term natural can reasonably be expected.

[a] Acts i. 11.

"Where is the promise of His coming?" Here is, thirdly, a kind of half-faith, half-unbelief, which receives Christ with one hand and repels Him with the other; which is willing to admit much about Him, but not to admit all that He says about Himself. In this state of mind men are glad that He came to teach, or to save them; to leave them an Example that they should follow His steps; to bear their sins in His own Body on the tree. He *has* done all this, they say; He has died, has risen, has left this world, is seated in some distant world on a Throne of Glory. If they said quite frankly what they feel and think, they would say that they are grateful for His benefits; but that, for the future, they wish to be left alone; left to themselves, left to their memories about Him. They would say that they hoped that He had done with the world; and their objection to the Second Coming is, that it breaks in violently upon this hope, as showing that He is very far from having done with it. Why should He not have brought His work to an end? Why should He haunt the race which He has blessed and raised? Why should He be like the importunate friend, who visits not only to say what is wise, and to do what is kind, and to bestow what is acceptable, but who comes again to see whether that which He has given, and done, and said, has been of real service and is still remembered?

These are the thoughts which lead up to the state of mind which St. Peter describes in the text. Natural impatience; half belief in God's action of old time; disbelief in His present activity; finally, a secret wish to think that He has left man to himself, and will not interfere with him for correction and judgment. To these succeeds another, in which unbelief takes definite shape, and endeavours to make its position good by argument:

"Where is the promise of His coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation."

The argument upon which these confident "scoffers" —to use the Apostle's word—rely, is that such an event as the Second Coming of Christ is at variance with what they observe in nature and in history. The Second Coming is said by Christ our Lord and His Apostles to be at once sudden and overwhelming; sudden, "like the lightning shining from the East unto the West;"[a] overwhelming, "in that the earth and the works that are therein shall be burnt up."[b] The scoffers say that they look around them and find no precedents for such an expectation as this. "Where is the promise of His coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation." Here, say they, we are told to expect a sudden and violent catastrophe. Whereas nature, so they contend, is, and has been for ages, gradual, regular, orderly, without breach of continuity, without convulsive disturbance, without anything that is not the product of some clearly preceding cause. And human history, too, is, upon the whole, similarly ordered and regular; it proceeds like a thing of natural growth, from stage to stage, from condition to condition, the rudest civilisations melting by slow degrees into the highest, this generation making way for that, this realm, this constitution for that, so that the final result is connected with all that has preceded it by a series of links, each leading on surely but gradually to the next after it. Is it conceivable that all this will be broken up at a moment's notice by a sudden volcanic convulsion; that this natural world, with all its ordered life and beauty, will be resolved into chaos; that this more marvellous

[a] St. Matt. xxiv. 27. [b] 2 St. Pet. iii. 10–12.

world of human beings, of millions of lives, each the scene of a mysterious history, and all welded by the labour of centuries into a complex whole, will be one day ended, without discussion or parley, without such delay as might procure arrest of judgment—ended by the mere fiat of the Judge—a fiat uttered in a moment—resistless, irreversible?

III.

Brethren, let us place ourselves under St. Peter's guidance, and see how, in the verses which follow the text, he deals with this way of looking at things.

First of all, he raises the question of fact. The objector says that there have been no catastrophes, and that, therefore, none are to be expected. St. Peter points to the Deluge. That event was, whatever else may be said of it, a catastrophe, both in the history of nature and the history of man. This, says St. Peter, the objectors "willingly are ignorant of, that by the Word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water."[a] They were, because He made them. And yet, by these agencies which He had created, "the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished."[b] And then he proceeds to draw his conclusion. What has been, or the like of it, may be again. "The heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same Word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the Day of Judgment and perdition of ungodly men."[c] There may be a difference in the agency employed; then it was water, hereafter it will be fire. But the events are of

[a] 2 St. Pet. iii. 5. [b] *Ib.* 6. [c] *Ib.* 7.

the same destructive character; their purpose is equally judicial; the Power which orders them is the same Omnipotence.

St. Peter points to the Deluge; but the Deluge, although the greatest recorded catastrophe in human history, does not stand alone. All through the ages during which man has inhabited this planet, there has been a succession of tragic occurrences, whether on the face of Nature or in the region of human history. Holy Scripture calls these occurrences judgments; and they are judgments. They effect on a small scale, and for a generation or a race, what the Universal Judgment will effect for all the races of men, and once for all.

Sometimes it is the work of nature, or rather, to speak accurately, of God in nature. Such in the old days of the Patriarchal history was the destruction of the sinful Cities of the Plain.[a] Such in the splendid days of the Roman Empire, and in a neighbourhood much frequented by the wealthy citizens of the capital of the world, was the destruction of Pompeii and Herculaneum. In the last century, our great-grandfathers were accustomed to look upon the earthquake of Lisbon as an event of this character; and that mighty wave which, pouring along the sea-board of Bengal only the other day, swept some two hundred thousand human beings into eternity, is a recent instance of Nature doing that which it will achieve hereafter on a gigantic scale, in thus winding up the account of a vast number of reasonable creatures with the God Who made them.[b] The only difference is in the area or

[a] Gen. xix. 24, 25.

[b] See the *Guardian* of Nov. 22 and 29, 1876. Dakhin, Shakabazpore, Hattiah, and Sundeep, with numerous small islands, were entirely submerged by the storm-wave, and also the mainland about four miles inland. Sir R. Temple estimates the number of those who perished through the inundation and the ravages of the cyclone at 215,000.

scale of operation; the moral significance in these recent instances is the same as that of the Deluge, or indeed of the natural convulsions which will accompany the coming of the Son of Man.

Sometimes, again, these judgments are the work of man. Such was the destruction of the Canaanites; such, again, was the destruction of Jerusalem. Such, on a gigantic scale, was the fall of the Roman Empire. At that dark time it seemed to sober minds that all that was settled and civilized in the world, all that was a guarantee for order and law, for ownership of property and security of life, for those ideas without which society falls back into utter barbarism, was being swept away.[a] Such, again, was the French Revolution. It, as we all know, was a convulsion, the like of which had not been seen for a thousand years; it closed one period in the history of Europe, and it opened another. But when it burst upon the world, not a few thought that the end had really come; that the signs of the Second Advent were already legible in the face of day.

What has been, St. Peter did say, and would say now, may be. What has been on a smaller scale, if you will, may be repeated on a greater. It matters not that all looks settled and quiet; the ocean is sometimes calmest on the eve of the storm. The Roman Empire had stood for centuries; men believed that it would stand for ever. Men spoke of Rome as the Eternal City; but its hour came, and it fell. Some of our Indian fellow-subjects had gazed during a long lifetime on the sea which washed their coasts; and they would have smiled three months since had they been told that one night it would rise to a height of twenty feet above the land, and sweep

[a] Compare the treatise of Salvian of Marseilles, *De Gubernatione Mundi.*

every living thing before it. Yet the cyclone came; and, in an hour or so, all was over.

Secondly, St. Peter grapples with the complaint that the Second Coming is so long delayed. It seems intolerable to man to wait, month after month, year after year, century after century; to cry with the Prophet of old, "Oh that Thou wouldest rend the heavens and come down!"[a] and to cry, as it seems, unheeded. God, so man secretly thinks, must be impatiently waiting too; waiting upon events which He cannot wholly control. He, too, must share something of the lassitude of deferred expectations, hopes, fears; He, too, must desire to "finish His work, and cut it short in righteousness,"[b] instead of letting year after year pass, while all is incomplete.

No, says the Apostle, God is not as man; and man never makes a graver mistake than when he makes his own finite nature a measure of the awful Being Who made him. As God is uncircumscribed by space, so He is unlimited by time. For God time does not exist; for God there is no past, no present, no future. He lives in an Eternal Present. The sequence of events which millions of men measure, in their long succession, as they stream across the ages, are grasped all at once, as by a single act of the Infinite Mind. To Him all the events of our separate lives, all the great epochs in the history of our country, all the turning-points in the history of the world, separated from us by hundreds, by thousands of years, are still present. He does not remember, He contemplates them. And in like manner the future is before Him. All the men who are yet to live, all the events that are yet to surprise the world, all the failures and successes, the rises and falls, of races, of

[a] Isa. lxiv. 1. [b] Rom. ix. 28.

empires, are, like the past, present to His Mind. He does not anticipate, He surveys them. So it is with the Flood. Some fifty centuries or more have passed: but the event as a whole, and its minute incidents, are spread out at this moment before the Eye of God. So with the Second Coming. However distant it may be, to Him it is an already present event; He already sees all its awe, all its splendour, all the indescribable bliss, all the unutterable woe, that will surround the Throne of the manifested Judge. And thus there is in God no room for expectation or weariness; the Intellect which had to wait for any possible object of contemplation would be less than Infinite.

This is what St. Peter means by his earnest warning. "Beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day."[a] For the Infinite Mind time means nothing; for Him there is no such thing as delay. For Him, all that will be, is; the only question is, how and when will it be unrolled to us. True, we know not how long we may have to wait; but the centuries do not exist for the Eternal God. It is in lifting up our thoughts to Him, in looking at what He has announced—if we may dare so to speak—with His Eye, that we see how foolish it is thus to import into our calculations about His announcements those petty rules of measurement which we lear amid the things of time. The uniformity of Nature, the regular course of history, the ages which have passed, which yet may pass, ere Jesus Christ comes again,—what are these things as against the clear Word and Promise of Him Who works by rule, and yet employs catastrophes; Who describes what He sees; and to Whom, from the necessity of His Being, there is no such thing as delay?

[a] 2 St. Pet. iii. 8.

But, thirdly, can a reason be assigned for the delay of Christ's coming to Judgment? We know that this delay is not accidental; we know that it is not enforced; we know that it is not the result of caprice. But, then, what is its reason?

St. Peter answers this question too. He says that there is a moral purpose, strictly in accordance with the revealed Mind of God, in this delay. "God is not slack concerning His promise, as some men count slackness; but is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."[a]

As love is the motive which moved God to surround Himself with created beings who could never repay Him for the privilege of existence, so in love does He linger over the work of His Hands when it has forfeited its title to exist. As "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life,"[b] so He would fain extend, though it were to no purpose, the priceless blessings of Redemption, so long as any may be redeemed. The delay is not accidental or capricious, still less is it forced; it is dictated by the yearnings of the Heart of God, bending over the moral world in unspeakable compassion. And every judgment, even the least, is preceded by a period of preparation or delay. The Flood did not come until "the wickedness of man was great on the earth."[c] Physically, it was the product of natural causes, which were in operation long before they issued in a scene of ruin and death; and morally, it was provoked by a volume of human wickedness which just reached its height when the floodgates of Heaven were opened. Jerusalem did not fall until it had slain

[a] 2 St. Pet. iii. 9. [b] St. John iii. 16. [c] Gen. vi. 5.

the Just One and had killed His Saints and Servants;[a] but the political and religious causes which led to its fall had been at work for a hundred years. The French Revolution, with its repudiation of the Christian past, with its irrational passion, with its frightful tragedies, burst upon Europe suddenly enough in 1789. But for three generations, at the least, it had been preparing amid the splendours and the sins of the old French monarchy; it, too, like a flood, or a volcanic eruption, was a thing of regular growth; it, too, might have been foretold almost in detail by a close observer of men and affairs; it, too, was delayed year after year, in mercy, until at last the fountains of the deep broke up, and all that had been the France of Christian history was engulfed in the whirlpool of destructive passion.

So it will be—so it is—with the Last Great Day. It will not be the first physical catastrophe that has changed the surface of this planet; ages of silent evolution precede the decisive moment which changes the surface of a globe by flood or by fire. It will not be the first moral catastrophe that has profoundly affected the destiny of man, though it will be beyond all comparison the greatest. True, it is not yet upon us; but it is surely, silently in preparation. As the moments pass they bring us nearer one by one to the Second Advent. As lives are lived and then drop silently out of sight, as actions are done or left undone, one way or the other they tend to make the Judgment more imperative, more inevitable Each man, each nation, lives, and by living brings it nearer; its causes are ever accumulating new force and urgency; the angels are ever moving about silently, making the necessary dispositions. And at last their task will be achieved, and the Judge will come. One cause

[a] Acts vii. 52.

still delays it—the Love of God. Christ's coming will be sudden when it does take place; but it will be the product of a lengthened preparation. "The vision is yet for an appointed time, but in the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, and will not tarry."[a]

The answer, then, to the question of the scoffers, "Where is the promise of His coming?" is, that it is where it was when He made it. The uniformity of nature is no argument against it; the regular sequences of history are no argument against it; nature and history do but veil God's vast preparations for the future. Nor does delay make it improbable, or less probable by its prolongation; since for the Infinite Mind there is no such thing as delay; nothing is postponed when all is present. Nor need men be at a loss to account for postponement of the Great Judgment, or of any judgment, if they reflect upon the Love of God, which created, preserves, and has redeemed the world, and which prolongs to the utmost moment its time of trial.

It has been said, perhaps too truly, that we think much less of our Lord's Second Coming than did Christians in past times; and certainly the subject takes up much less room in our thoughts than in the pages of our New Testaments. And if this is the case, it is not as it should be. It shows that we live more in this, and less in the other world than did those before us; perhaps it shows that some of us live altogether in this, and in the other not at all. To living faith, the Second Advent is as present a fact as is the First. We know Who has told us that He will come again; we know that as He has been as good as His Word in the days that are gone, so

[a] Hab. ii. 3.

He will be in the coming time. Certainly, to each one of us, all will be over at the moment of death; all that can determine our place in the endless future. We know that death cannot be very distant, and that it may be very near. Death is practically judgment; and the thought and preparation which we bestow on the one catastrophe is a fair measure of our relation towards the other. But death is not all; "after death the Judgment."[a] "The day of God"[b]—so the Apostle calls it—that day on which, in every heart, in every imagination, for bliss or for woe, He will be alone exalted; that day on which all mere human ideals of greatness, all false standards of conduct or honour, all the shadows with which we men have toyed during the years of time, will fade as utterly away as if they had not been; that day when to have been true to Him, according to the light which He has given us—true to those Laws of Righteousness which He cannot change if He would, since they are His very Nature—true to that Divine Saviour Who has bought us with His Blood—will be happiness and joy unspeakable; that day may be long in coming, or it may come sooner than we think. But in any case it rests on a sure word of promise, and it will come at last. The question is, when it comes, how will it find us, all and each? Will it find us listless, unconcerned, unprepared, like the scoffers whom the Apostle describes; or shall we be, in St. Peter's own burning words, "looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God,"[c] by prayer, by repentance—above all, through His grace, by persistent sincerity of purpose?

[a] Heb. ix. 27. [b] 2 St. Pet. iii. 12. [c] *Ib.*

SERMON XIX.

MOTIVE OF CHRIST'S FIRST COMING.

(SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT.)

1 Tim. i. 15.

This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

THESE words are admirably calculated to help us to put our thoughts into order during Advent, when the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, clothed in our flesh, into this world of sense and time is prominently before us. Why did He come? What were the reasons, or what was the main reason, for this wonderful act of His Providence? What was it that determined Him, the Uncreated and the Eternal, to leave His glory; to empty Himself[a] of it, as St. Paul speaks, to take on Him the form of a servant, and be made in the likeness of men? No greater question than this, a Christian must feel, can possibly be raised, since it touches on the one hand the dearest interests of man, and on the other the inmost Nature of God. And this question is answered in the words, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners."

"Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." What is it that makes St. Paul preface this statement

[a] Phil. ii. 7, ἑαυτὸν ἐκένωσε.

by saying that it is "a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation"? Why does he not let the words speak for themselves, as is generally his way when announcing important truth, instead of calling attention to them by a recommendation like this?

The answer is, that the words, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners," are not the Apostle's own words; he is quoting some one else. He did not compose this saying; he was not inspired, first, to utter it; he found it current in the Christian Church, and made ready to his hand. Timothy, probably, was familiar enough with the saying before he received the Apostle's letter. It was a sort of proverb or maxim; it was a piece of the known Will of God put into a condensed and striking form, and then passed from mouth to mouth, and lodged first in one and then in another memory. When everything was new to the first believers in Christ, a saying like this would have been of obvious value. It would have been a short creed; a standard by which to measure loose, half-formed language on the subject; a guide by which to order wandering, or confused, or uncertain thoughts; "faithful" to the truth it expressed, and "worthy of all acceptation" by Christians. We do not know who composed it; like many of the most beautiful things in the world, it is the work of an unknown soul. St. Paul picked it up out of the Christian language of the day, and forthwith endorsed it with his Apostolic authority. "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners."

This is not the only instance of St. Paul's putting the seal of his approval upon maxims, epigrams, or poems already existing in the Church of Christ. When he quotes the words, "If a man desire the office of a Bishop,

he desireth a good work," he prefaces the quotation by remarking, "This is a true saying."[a] When he has repeated the maxin, "Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come," he adds, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation."[b] Again he exclaims, "If we be dead with Him, we shall also live with Him: if we suffer, we shall also reign with Him: if we deny Him, He also will deny us: if we believe not, yet He abideth faithful: He cannot deny Himself."[c] Of these words, which clearly formed part of an early hymn, used, probably enough, in the worship of the Church of Christ, St. Paul says, "It is a faithful saying." There are other "sayings" in these Epistles to Timothy and Titus; some of them apparently proverbs circulating in the Apostolic Church, some of them fragments of hymns which were used by the first Christians. Once St. Paul cites the pagan poet Epimenides for the character of the Cretans: "The Cretans are alway liars, evil beasts, slow bellies," and then adds, "This witness is true."[d] In all these cases he takes a piece of existing language; takes it out of the connection in which he finds it; pledges himself for its truth, and value; stamps it with his authority; gilds it with his inspiration;—just as the practised eye of a lapidary might detect a precious stone in a heap of rubbish, and then rescue and polish and perchance set it, to take its place in the diadem of a monarch. Of the many powers which are implied in the gift of inspiration, that of unerring selection from existing materials is certainly not the least important.

So much for the Apostle's general practice.

But why did St. Paul detect and proclaim in this particular maxim such titles to our confidence; such

[a] 1 Tim. iii. 1. [b] *Ib.* iv. 8, 9. [c] 2 Tim. ii. 11–13. [d] Tit. i. 12, 13.

claims to universal acceptance as he asserts? Why are the words, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners," a "faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation"?

I.

The first reason for the truth and importance of this saying is that it is clearly made up out of our Divine Lord's own words. On two different occasions our Lord referred to the purpose of His coming into the world, and that in terms which completely justify the wording of this saying. When the Pharisees asked the disciples of our Lord why their Master ate and drank with publicans and sinners, He simply said, "I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."[a] When men murmured at the welcome which He gave to the publican Zacchæus, He explained, "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."[b] In fact, He had not "come into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved."[c] Thus the Christian proverb only put Christ's own blessed words into another and more compendious shape; and this was, no doubt, St. Paul's first reason for pressing them so strongly upon Timothy's attention.

Remark, brethren, the high authority which belongs to this saying, now that we see Whose it really is. Man, in his short-sightedness, could only have guessed at the purposes of the Eternal when entering into time, of the Illimitable when submitting to bonds; and these guesses would have partaken of all that liability to error which is inseparable from the judgment of fallible men. Man could only have guessed; but He, our Lord and Saviour,

[a] St. Matt. ix. 13. [b] St. Luke xix. 10. [c] St. John iii. 17.

knew. From all eternity He was privy to the counsel of the Father; and if He spoke to men with created Lips, it was out of the depths of the Uncreated Intelligence. "No man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and He to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him."[a] And therefore, when He tells us what was His great purpose in coming among us, He leaves no room for doubt in any soul which trusts Him. Men have asked whether He would have come among us if man had never sinned. To that we can only say, we do not know. What we do know is, that when He took upon Him to deliver man, He did not abhor the Virgin's womb. What we confess with heart and mouth is, that being "God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God, of One Substance with the Father, He, for us men, and for our salvation, came down from Heaven." This, the language of the Creed, is only an expansion of the saying commended to us by the Apostle; and both are based on the very words of our Lord Himself. "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners."

II.

A second reason for the significance of this saying lies in the light which it throws on the purpose of God.

The temptation to cherish hard thoughts of God is very old; if antiquity could make such a temptation respectable, it would be very respectable indeed. And it is also very modern; it appears and reappears in some of the most recent speculations of our age. "I feared thee because thou art an austere man,"[b] is the language which millions of hearts have secretly held in converse with the infinitely

[a] St. Matt. xi. 27. [b] *Ib.* xxv. 24.

Benevolent Creator. Nature and life seem, at first sight and under certain circumstances, to justify this. Nature is wasteful: she seems to create only to destroy; she seems to produce millions of living beings, who have no chance of existence, and who, being produced, must presently perish. And Nature is not merely wasteful; she is cruel. Pain—that weird mystery which haunts the higher forms of being—pain reigns in Nature with almost undisputed sway. Pain is an antecedent condition of life; the pain of one creature is a needful condition of nourishment to another. There is a hierarchy of suffering corresponding to the hierarchy of animate beings. The strong prey upon the defenceless and the weak; the last agonies of the lamb minister to the appetite and strength of the lion. And in watching the vicissitudes of many a human life —the unrequited kindness, the unrecognized merit, the wasted sympathy, the gifts bestowed on those who cannot or will not use them, the triumph of so much that deserves to fail, the failure of so much that should command success; men are tempted to ask, Where is the Holy and All-wise Ruler of the world? Now, Christianity has its own way of explaining the evils of society and life, and there are very many laws and provisions of nature which point to a Benevolent Author and Ruler of the universe; but still the darker features of nature and society do sometimes take possession of the minds of men; and they think and speak as though the Face of God were hidden by the clouds which gather around His works.

Against all this the saying of the text is a "faithful" exponent of the truth about God, and "worthy of all acceptation" by human beings. "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." Physical evil is the child of moral evil, and in all ways less serious. God saw on the

face of His works moral evil, and He determined that His own Arm must bring salvation. No created being, no saint or angel, could supply a remedy; the Everlasting Son of God bent from His Throne, dismissed His angels, put on Him a creature's form, that in it He might die. "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son."[a] For those who believe in the words of Christ, there is no real doubt as to the Divine purpose after this. The frowns of nature and the ills of life go for little against the tenderness, the unspeakable tenderness, of Redeeming Love. Clouds and darkness may be round about God, but righteousness and judgment are the habitation of His seat.[b] It is because this saying about the object of Christ's coming throws such a flood of welcome light upon the Attributes of God, that it is so faithful, and worthy of all acceptation by men.

III.

A third reason for the importance of this saying is that it reminds us men of the greatness of the work of Christ. Assuredly, it is of real importance to take a just view of the relative magnitude of the evils of life, as well as of the relative magnitude of our blessings. One man holds poverty to be the worst of all evils; another, the absence or the ingratitude of friends; a third, bad health; a fourth, the removal by death of those whom we love, and who make life bright to us. But, in fact, none of these evils are the greatest that can happen to us. They may be blessings; they may detach us from outward things, and turn the eye of our soul towards our Supreme and Only Good. Of each of them we may have occasion to

[a] St. John iii. 16. [b] Ps. xcvii. 2.

say hereafter, "It was good for me that I have been in trouble, that I might learn Thy statutes." [a]

But there is one evil of which this never can be said. Never can a moral being say, "It is good for me that I have sinned." Physical evil—pain, want, disease—may lead to moral good; moral evil, or sin, never. Sin is the antagonist of moral good, and, so far as it exists, it makes moral good impossible. Of physical evil, an Apostle cries, "If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him." [b] Of moral evil a Prophet asserts, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." [c]

What is it, this essential evil, which can never be, or help forward, good? It is nothing originally resident in nature; it is a rebellion against the Author of nature, in that one corner of nature where alone rebellion is possible. It is the perversion of a free will. The planet cannot but move in its orbit; the plant cannot but grow and bloom and die; the insect and the elephant must each obey the law of its kind. For these there is no discretion to be exercised as to whether they will or will not be and do what their Maker meant. But man has this discretion; it is at once his dignity and his peril. God willed, in creating, not merely to be served by beings who cannot but serve Him, but also to be served by a higher rank of beings, by men and angels, who might render a service which it was in their power to refuse. The refusal of this service is sin; and sin is, therefore, in the moral world, what a planet rushing out of its orbit would be in the world of nature. It is a contradiction of the rights of God, and of the best interests of man. And thus it has a range of destructive effect which touches man's inmost being, and which, unless it is arrested, lasts on into another sphere of existence.

[a] Ps. cxix. 71. [b] 2 Tim. ii. 12. [c] Ezek. xviii. 4.

"The soul that sinneth, it shall die." That is the law, written in the Eternal Mind, written in the nature of things. For God is the Source of life; and the self-determining being who abandons God, turns his back upon the Source of life, and, since there is no intermediate or neutral sphere or state, chooses death. This choice is made here in this world. Whatever takes place in Eternity is only a prolongation of that which happens in time.

That this is no dry or abstract speculation, but the most intimate and practical of our experiences, all of us know who know anything about ourselves at all. St. Paul speaks of "death working"[a] in a moral being; and the process may be watched by many of us, in ourselves. This subtle presence, which dulls the faculties within; which brings weakness and shame and disquiet in its train, as surely as it presents itself;—what is it? This wasting fever; this "plague," as Scripture calls it,[b] "of the heart;" this bitterness, which is felt in the central chamber of our being; this stain, which lies far out of sight, never referred to, only half recognized by the man's self, yet never obliterated, always ready to trace its dark outline upon reviving memory;—these ill-suppressed murmurs of deadened conscience, which, now and then in the dark hours of the night, will break out and sound through the recesses of the soul in a long wail of agony,—what are they? Ah! here is the voice, the stain, the presence of the one real evil; the evil which, being inveterate and unreformable, can never be turned to account by good. Here is the sense of discord with the true law of life, of rebellion against the Author and End of being. In a word, here is sin.

Now, if our Lord Jesus Christ had left this master-evil

[a] 2 Cor. iv. 12. [b] 1 Kings viii. 38.

untouched, He would not have saved man, in the proper sense of that expression, whatever else He might have done for him. The salvation of man is a very different thing from an improved condition of society. Christ. our Lord, has done more to improve society than any other influence that has been felt by man during the whole course of his history; but, had our Lord done only this, He would not have saved us. Social improvement is quite compatible with the eternal loss of multitudes whose social condition is improved. Again, the salvation of man is not another name for man's mental culture; although men sometimes use language which might seem to imply that it is. The highest accomplishments may coexist with entire spiritual ruin. Brilliant light may play on a corpse without reviving it. Nor is the salvation of man only another term for improved outward conduct. Such improvement is, indeed, a consequence of salvation; but outward good conduct may be dictated by reasons of temporal expediency, by disgust at past excesses, by natural self-respect. Conduct may be improved on the surface of life, while the centre remains unchanged. Christ did not come to make respectable those who would not be cured. Nor is the salvation of man even a new state of feeling; it includes this, but it is something more, something deeper. Feeling, religious feeling, may be superficial; we all know that the ready command of tears is by no means a sign of the tenderest heart. Feeling may be partly, nay largely, physical; a mere product of natural constitution and temperament. In all circumstances, feeling is too much mixed up with the nerves and fibres of our bodily frame to be a safe index of our spiritual condition.

No! salvation consists in a renewed will; a will renewed by its adhesion to the perfect Moral Being. This

begins in time; it ends in Eternity. The will is the governing faculty in man; the will is the rudder, which the ship of the soul obeys in its passage across the sea of time; the will means, and is, the real nature; the better nature turning towards God, or the old bad nature turning away from Him. Everything else in us follows the lead of the will; it controls, sooner or later, conduct, feeling, even thought, and outward things besides. It is the imperial faculty, by which all else is guided, and on which all else in us depends. And when the will ha made that complete act of adhesion to Jesus Christ—the perfect Moral Being—which we call faith, all else follows, and man is saved.

Our Lord came to save men by doing three things for the human will; He gave it freedom, He gave it a new and true direction, He gave it strength.

He began by setting it free. It was enslaved to sense, to passion, to the things of time. He emancipated it. It was weighted with the memories or the inheritance of sin. He removed this weight, by taking it on Himself. It was, if we may say so, natural that He should do this, since He was the Representative or Pattern Man. As such, He could put Himself in place of each member of the race, and act for each, and transfer from each to Himself, Who represented all, what each but for Him must have borne alone. "He bare our sins in His own Body on the Tree, that we, being dead to sin, might live unto righteousness."[a] He lifted from the conscience, and so from the will of man, from all human wills that desired emancipation, the old burden which had come down from past ages, and the new burden which might have been laid on itself by each separate soul. The human will was free.

[a] 1 St. Pet. ii. 24.

Next, He gave to the will a new direction. Since Adam's fall the will had had a fatal warp towards what was wrong. Like machinery which has got out of gear in consequence of some violent shock, it still worked, but it worked awry. It could not be depended on; it broke away from control and plunged into mischief at critical moments, when steadiness in one true line of action was before all things needed. Christ, our Lord, reset it; He put it back on its old and true orbit, round the One Centre of moral life, the Everlasting Being. "Ye were," says St. Peter, "as sheep gone astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls." [a]

Thirdly, He gave to the will strength to act, and to persevere in acting freely, in its new direction. He did this through grace; that is, an invigorating power or influence streaming, by the agency of His Spirit, from Himself. Without this the old mischief might have returned. Without this the will might soon again have been enslaved to nature, to passion, to created and perverted wills around it. He braced its relaxed sinews by His grace; and one of the earliest possessors of His gift exclaimed, "I can do all things through Christ that strengtheneth me." [b] Thus has Christ saved believing sinners. First of all, He has pardoned them; He has made their sins His own, and they are free. Next, He has put them, by His grace, on the true road which man should follow, and has given them strength to follow it. He completed this work by His Death upon the Cross, but the means of grace in His Church are intended to give effect to it in detail. The message to the world, preached from the first days until now, is the forgiveness of sins; the salvation of sinners through Christ. This is why we proclaim our faith in "one Baptism for the

[a] 1 St. Pet. ii. 25. [b] Phil. iv. 13.

remission of sins." This is why He "hath given power, and commandment, to His Ministers, to declare and pronounce to His people, being penitent, the Absolution and Remission of their sins." This is the reason for our praying that all who receive the Sacrament of His Body and Blood "may receive forgiveness of their sins, and all other benefits of His Passion." Indeed, as many of you will remember, this precious saying, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners," is one of the four passages from Scripture which guard the approach to the Altar, and remind us, at the most solemn moments of the Christian life, of the true purpose of Christ's coming among us. Then, when nothing trivial, nothing irrelevant, should occupy our thoughts, we are guided to this "faithful saying," so "worthy of all acceptation," so intimately bound up with the most vital interests of our souls.

IV.

A fourth reason which may convince us of the importance of this saying, is its interest for all men.

My brethren, we differ in various respects; in age, in temperament, in means, in accomplishments, in abilities, in moral and mental characteristics. Each age has its peculiarities; each country has its own temper and type of civilization; each class has its good points and its weak points, its elevating convictions and its unworthy prejudices; no two human characters, as no two human faces, are exactly alike. But one thing there is which unites us all; one consciousness there is in which we all, of all ages, of all countries, of all classes and tempers, sooner or later must agree, and that is that we are sinners. It is now as it was of old. David's saying is always true:

"There is none righteous, no, not one."[a] St. Paul's saying is always true: "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God."[b] If sin is not on the surface of life, depend upon it, it is not far from the centre; if it is not prominent in the outer shape and form of action, it is the more surely to be detected near the springs of motive; if it does not inflict upon us open shame and social confusion, it may yet make us bend in secret humiliation, to which language can do no justice, before the Majestic Sanctity of God. It is not only that the heathen or the unconverted are sinners. It is not that sin is monopolized by the victims of great penal calamities; by the men whose blood Pilate mingled with their sacrifices;[c] by the men on whom the tower of Siloam fell.[d] No, "if we," the redeemed of Christ, "say that we have not sinned, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."[e] Do not let us imagine that a renewed life makes a bad action good. On the contrary, a bad action destroys, for the time being at any rate, a renewed life. Only by constantly recognizing sin, and begging for pardon from the Crucified Redeemer, can we be safe. It is not the pagan, it is the generations of Christendom, who should take up the language of the Prophet: "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every man to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all."[f]

St. Paul quotes the saying, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners," and then he adds, "of whom I am chief." The last thing that occurs to him is to except himself. He is, of course, not speaking of the absolute fact; of that even he, inspired Apostle as he was, could not be certain. Only the Eternal Judge could

[a] Ps. xiv. 4. [b] Rom. iii. 23. [c] St. Luke xiii. 1.
[d] *Ib.* 4. [e] 1 St. John i. 8. [f] Isa. liii. 6.

know who, in all the ages of mankind, would be the chief among sinners in His own unerring sight. But in St. Paul's own estimate of sinners he himself came first. There was, he firmly believed, no such sinner as he. He had done worse than any other that he knew. He had had more light, more grace, than any man that he knew. From his own point of view, this primacy among sinners which he claimed as his own, was no half-sincere or rhetorical hyperbole; it was the proclamation of a fixed conviction. He stated it as a simple truth, which humbled him to the dust; just as when he said that he was "not meet to be called an apostle,"[a] and that he was "less than the least of Christians."[b] This estimate of self is common in those who live very near God, and who, in the rays of Divine Light, see motes and flaws of character which escape duller and earth-bound eyes. Each of the saints says, age after age, with perfect sincerity, "He came to save sinners; and of these, I am the chief."

Brethren, the world is old enough to have accumulated a vast number of shrewd sayings. They float about in books, in conversation; they are handed on, handed down from man to man, from father to son; we learn them, and load our memories with them, and stock our conversation with them, we scarcely know when or how. There they are; maxims of prudence, maxims of honour, maxims for good behaviour in society, maxims for taking a just view of men and events. Each of them claims to embody some measure of wisdom. Many of them are worthless enough; good only for repartee, for sharp conversation, for much which does not really help us on towards the end of our existence. We should not care to remember them if we thought that we were dying. It would be better for us if we could forget many of them altogether, and at once.

[a] 1 Cor. xv. 9. [b] Eph. iii. 8.

But it is not so with this saying in the text. It tells us the truth, and we do well to trust it. It brings us an offer of God's grace and Love, and we do well to accept it. At all times should this precious saying be pressed close to the heart and the memory, that it might, by God's grace, move, guide, invigorate the will. At all times, but especially, as I have said, in Advent. For now we are standing between Christ's two Comings—His first in mercy, His second for judgment; His first in the manger of Bethlehem, His second on the clouds of Heaven. "Who shall abide the day of His second Coming? Who shall stand when He appeareth?"[a] They, and they only, who have made the most of His first Advent; who have borne well in heart and mind that He came to save them from their sins, and so to make His second Coming not merely tolerable, but welcome. We believe that "He will come to be our Judge." But, on this very account, we do well to pray Him to help us His servants, for whom, sinners as we are, He entered into this world of sense and time, and died upon the Cross, that He might, if only we will, save us to the uttermost.[b]

[a] Mal. iii. 2. [b] Heb. vii. 25.

SERMON XX.

RESULTS OF CHRIST'S FIRST COMING.

(THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT.)

ST. LUKE II. 34.

Behold, this Child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel.

THIS was a saying of the aged Simeon, when our Lord Jesus Christ was presented in the Temple, on the occasion of His Blessed Mother's Purification. Simeon took the Divine Child up in his arms, and blessed God, and said, "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy Word: for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation, which Thou hast prepared before the face of all people; a Light to lighten the Gentiles, and the Glory of Thy people Israel."[a] This burst of inspired song in the aged servant of God moved astonishment in Joseph, and even in Mary, who had already, in her own *Magnificat*, from a somewhat different point of view, extolled the greatness of her Divine Son. Simeon's last words, "the Glory of Thy people Israel," would have lingered in the memory of Mary and Joseph, as the last phrase of a gifted speaker often will linger in a listener's ear. But Simeon probably felt that this expression required explanation. "The Glory of Israel" was a phrase

[a] St. Luke ii. 29–32.

already consecrated in religious language; it commonly meant the Sacred Presence, or Shekinah, resting between the Cherubim over the Ark of the Covenant. Israel, as St. Paul afterwards pointed out,[a] had, indeed, many prerogatives among the nations. Israel was God's adopted family. Israel inherited the covenants; those early understandings between earth and Heaven, of which the great patriarchs had been the favoured recipients. To Israel God had revealed, in its completeness, the moral Law. Israel offered to God a worship, the nature and details of which had been Divinely ordered. Israel, so rich in the past, was also the people of the future: the "promises" were its endowment for the coming ages. And, in the fathers or patriarchs, Israel had not merely a store of precious memories, but a lasting possession; the patriarchs were the property, so to speak, of their descendants to the end of time. But the true glory of Israel was this—that of its stock and blood, as concerning the flesh, He came, Whose Incarnation the Sacred Presence on the ark prefigured, and Who is over all, God blessed for ever.[b] All else that Israel was or had—its sacred books, its typical ritual, its ideal of righteousness in the moral Law, its great saints and heroes—pointed to this its highest prerogative. The promised Christ was to be of the seed of David according to the flesh. And this condition was fulfilled when Jesus came.

"The Glory of Israel!" It was a phrase well calculated to take possession of Jewish imaginations when referred to a Deliverer not yet come. But what would be its power in later history? Would, then, all Israelites hasten to recognize their true title as a race to greatness? Would all hearts join in one outburst of thankful praise when "the Glory of Israel" presented Himself to

[a] Rom. ix. 4, 5. [b] *Ib.*

His countrymen? Simeon feels that it is a duty to check unwarrantable expectations; expectations which his earlier words might have encouraged. "Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary His mother, Behold, this Child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel."[a]

Thus the words of Simeon in the text are intended to check natural but undue expectations about the effect of the First Coming of Christ. And as such they may help us now in Advent-time, though they are more properly associated with our Lord's Presentation in the Temple. The Child of Mary—the Everlasting Son of the Father—is "set," by the counsels of God, in Jewish history, in human history, for the fall and rising again of many a human soul.

I.

First, then, let us here remark that Christ's coming into the world would not have a uniform effect upon human souls. It would act on one soul in one way, and on another in another. It would act differently on the same soul at different periods. It would occasion the "fall" as well as the "rising again of many."

My brethren, looking to the kindness and love of God our Saviour,[b] looking to His Power and Majesty, it is perhaps natural to think and speak as though, by a kind of strict and insurmountable necessity, His Advent must bring a blessing to every human being. To think thus may be natural, but it is not reasonable, or in accordance with what He has taught us to expect. Christ, by His coming into the world, does not bless everybody, though it is in His Heart to do so. His good will is limited by the free action of men. Men can, if they like, reject Him; and they do. He is the Glory of the people at

[a] St. Luke ii. 34. [b] Tit. iii. 4.

large; but of the individuals who compose it, many will lose, as many will gain, by His living among them. "Behold, this Child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel."

This is only to say that the spiritual world is not ruled mechanically. If Christ had come from Heaven as a resistless influence for good, so that men could not but be bettered by Him, the result would have been mechanical; just as mechanical as anything which is set going by steam-power or by water-power. And yet, even in vegetable or brute nature, some conditions are requisite if physical reinforcements of vital power are to be of real use. The sun and the rain can do little for the sickly or withered tree. The greenest pasturage cannot tempt the dying hind. There must be an existing capacity for being nourished, in the tree and in the animal, if there is to be improvement. Much more does this law obtain in the spiritual world. For, being a spirit, man is free; he can accept or reject, even the highest gifts of God. He is never coerced into excellence, any more than he is coerced into wickedness; he is, in the highest sense, master of his destiny. The truth and grace of God only act upon him with good results so far as he is willing that they should do so. God has made man free. He does not withdraw this prerogative of freedom, even when it is used against Himself; and the exercise of this freedom by man to accept or reject even his own highest good, explains the different results of Christ's coming in different souls. "This Child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel."

That such an event as our Lord's Advent would have great, although not uniform, results, was indeed inevitable. It acted as a moral shock upon the existing fabric of thought and life. It disturbed the old stagnant modes

of feeling and thinking; it set men in movement. It led to anxious self-questionings, widespread anxiety of mind, general unsettlement. It destroyed that tranquil satisfaction with things as they were in Israel, which secured so much repose and ease of mind to so many worthy Israelites, to so many classes in Israel. Such an event would reveal, above all, the true character of the time; it would act as may a flash of lightning on the crew of a wreck, as a torch carried by night over a battle-field. It would dispel illusions somewhat rudely, often at the cost of happiness and temper. And, as a consequence, it would be regarded differently by different men. Those who wished to know and live in the truth at all costs, would welcome it and thank God for it. Those who did not wish this, would slink away from an influence which made them uncomfortable, even though they might have reason to think that in the end it would make them better.

In ordinary life there are many occurrences which, in a lower sense, act upon men in different ways; they bring out unsuspected tendencies for good or evil. Thus it has been truly said that a railway accident, or a fire, or the outbreak of an epidemic, or the sudden inheritance of a fortune, each in their way cause revelations of character. They break through artificial habits of thought and language, and surprise men into being perfectly natural. They reveal and develop unexpected beauties in one man's character; heroism, generosity, disinterestedness. They bring unimagined weaknesses to the surface in another; they unveil the men in whom there is not sufficient moral strength to bear the pressure of new events: they show that they are selfish, cowardly, or in other ways unlike what they were supposed to be. In the same way, a great controversy or quarrel, on some question of duty,

in the family, in the Church, in the country, acts as a solvent upon all sorts of persons, and gives them an impulse in one direction or another. It throws them back upon the principles which really rule them; it precipitates a great deal in them which else might have remained undecided; it forces them to take a side, and, by taking a side, to make a revelation—a revelation of character; and they must take a step forward in the very act of doing so. And much more is this the case when men are brought into contact with a mind and heart of unwonted greatness. Many of us can remember something of the kind happening to us at some period of our lives. We saw a person whom we shall never forget; and the event was such as to have made us better or worse. A great character is too imperative to leave others just as they were; he inevitably sets feelings, thoughts, wills, in motion; not always in friendly motion towards himself, not unfrequently in hostile or prejudiced motion. And this was especially the case with our Lord Jesus Christ when He appeared. Men could not regard Him with indifference; they could not escape some sort of profound emotion at coming into contact with Him. When He made His entry into Jerusalem, "all the city was moved, saying, Who is this?"[a] And this was a sort of concrete representation of what took place at His entrance into the world. That momentous event produced a varied and prolonged commotion in human souls; it stirred the lowest instincts as well as the highest thoughts of men; it was one fulfilment of that pregnant saying, "Yet once more I shake, not the earth only, but also Heaven."[b] But its result was not, could not be, uniform; it was "for the fall" no less than for the "rising again of many in Israel."

[a] St. Matt. xxi. 10. [b] Hag. ii. 6; Heb. xii. 26.

II.

Note that, of the two effects of Christ's Advent, Simeon mentions, as first in order, "the fall of many in Israel." It must strike us as bold, to the very verge of paradox, thus to associate His Blessed Name, Who came to be the Help and Saviour of men, with their spiritual failure. Yet this language was in keeping with what prophecy might have led men to expect. Isaiah had said that the Lord Himself would be "a Stone of stumbling and a Rock of offence to both the houses of Israel," [a] and this was shown to be the case again and again during the course of Israel's history. Israel's worst falls were occasioned by the misuse of privileges designed to lead to God. Their table was made a snare to take themselves withal, and the things that should have been for their help became to them an occasion of falling.[b] The despised Prophets, the neglected sacrifices, the forgotten Law; all these were steps in their downward course. What would happen when the greatest of all God's gifts was bestowed; when He gave His best and choicest; when, having sent Prophet after Prophet, He said, in the fulness of time, "They will reverence My Son"?[c]

The prediction of Simeon was fulfilled even when our Lord appeared as a public Teacher. "He was despised and rejected of men;" [d] by the great majority of the Jewish people. The learned classes—the Scribes—would have nothing to say to Him. The so-called religious public—the Pharisees—would have nothing to say to Him. The political religionists—the Herodians—they, too, would have nothing to say to Him. "The

[a] Isa. viii. 14.
[b] Ps. lxix. 23.
[c] St. Matt. xxi. 37.
[d] Isa. liii. 3.

common people heard Him gladly"[a] in the earlier days of His ministry; but the time came when they, too, cried out, "Let Him be crucified!"[b] Only a few predestined souls clung to Him; others came near, without doing more; the great body fell away. St. Paul reviews the whole case in his Epistle to the Romans. Israel as a whole, he admits, had fallen.[c] Only a remnant was left, as in the days of Elijah.[d] As to the majority, they were weighed down by a spirit of slumber—"eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear."[e]

Now, what was the kind of fall which Christ occasioned to the majority of the Jewish people? It was not a fall from the profession of the religion of Moses. On the contrary, they pleaded the profession of this religion as a reason for rejecting the claims of Jesus Christ. Nor was it a fall from morality. There was no great deterioration on this score in the generation which rejected Christ. To all appearance they remained what they had been. They resisted innovation; innovation as proclaimed by Christ and His disciples. They said that they had Abraham for their father;[f] that they had the Law of Moses for their rule of life;[g] that they had the Prophets to warn and stimulate and instruct them;[h] that they had the Temple, with its Divinely ordered ordinances, in which to worship.[i] In clinging to these at all costs, in resisting all teaching which implied that these were not enough, how could they fall? Failure, apostasy—so a Jew would have said—must be looked for elsewhere, among those who gave up their old religion for a new one. Yet their failure lay in turning from the Christ when He pre-

[a] St. Mark xii. 37. [b] St. Matt. xxvii. 22. [c] Rom. xi.
[d] *Ib.* 2–5. [e] *Ib.* 10. [f] St. John viii. 39.
[g] *Ib.* ix. 28, 29. [h] *Ib.* viii. 52, 53. [i] *Ib.* ii. 20.

sented Himself to them. And why was this a fall in any sense? Why was it not rather a steadfastness in old convictions, which deserved to be spoken of in very different terms? The answer is, because Christ was the true end and explanation of Jewish history. Everything in it pointed to Him. He was the subject of the promises made to the Patriarchs; He was the signification of the ritual prescribed by the Law; He was the Deliverer announced, in the most various terms, by successive Prophets; He was the true outcome of the theocratic people, of the people of religion, of the people which had before its eyes an Ideal of Righteousness. To reject Him was to reject itself; to fall from all that its past implied; to fall from the guidance which God had vouchsafed during successive centuries. And He was not more rejected by sin than by the religious narrowness which would not listen to what He had to say, and took shelter under an appeal to the Law and the Prophets, and the old customs, and the ruling prejudices of the time. Israel, in rejecting Him, seemed to be holding its own; but in reality it fell away from the spirit and substance of all that it clung to.

This is a point which should be noticed carefully. A nation, a branch of the Church, a man, may fall from truth, from right, from God, not only by taking a new and wrong course, but by dogged refusal to go forward in the path of improvement at the bidding of conscience and of God. One truth leads a man on to another; and to reject the second truth is implicitly to discredit the first, which implies it. One duty suggests another; and to decline the second is to weaken the obligation of the first. When the Jews had rejected Christ, they had really discredited the Revelation of Moses and the voices of the Prophets. They could only cling to those sacred writings at all by shutting their eyes to their spirit and

drift, and by making the most of the mere letter. They seemed to be exactly where and what they had been. But they had really fallen.

Of falls from failure to go forward at the bidding of Christ, the rich young man who came to Him is a leading instance. His moral sense had drawn him to the presence of Christ; he instinctively felt that here was a Teacher Who could speak, at least, with that sort of authority which comes with goodness. He wished to be conscious of the entire approval of a Master like this, and so he submitted himself to an examination. He had kept the great commandments of the Law; he thought all was well with him; "What lack I yet?" When our Lord laid on him the counsel to "sell what he had, and give to the poor, and come follow Me," he turned away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.[a] He fell, not from the outward type of his former life, but from the line of spiritual progress along which he was advancing.

Now, a fall like this looks better to the eye than it really is. Nothing is changed—at least, immediately—in the bearing and habits of the outward life. The "form of godliness,"[b] if it existed before, and as it existed before, continues, at any rate, for a time. But such a life is like a plant whose root has been just eaten out by a worm. The vital principle of growth is destroyed when a Divine call to advance has been knowingly and wilfully set aside.

Somewhat different is a fall like that of Judas. Judas was already one of the chosen Twelve; yet he was also, in our Lord's words, "a devil."[c] Judas fell through one besetting sin. But his covetousness, which might have worked only ordinary havoc on another theatre of events, was, in that Most Sacred Presence, nothing less than irretrievable ruin. The Presence of Christ was like the

[a] St. Matt. xix. 16–22. [b] 2 Tim. iii. 5. [c] St. John vi. 70.

Moral Law; it stimulated into latent evil opposition to to itself.[a] Judas was irritated into treason by the tranquil, unassailable Holiness with which he companioned day by day; but Judas fell, not merely from what he might have been, but from what he had been. It would have been better for such an one not to have known the way of life.[b] It would have been good for him if he had never been born.[c]

Assuredly, my friends, religion does not save us by the mere fact of our being brought into intimate contact with it. Those who have known most about it in early youth, the sons of religious parents, sometimes turn out its worst enemies. They appear to speak with authority when they say that they have tried and found it wanting. They are like soldiers who, after making themselves perfectly acquainted with their general's resources and position, go over to the enemy and place their knowledge at his disposal. This sad sight, as many of us know, has been repeated in not a few conspicuous instances in this and the last generation, as well as in instances which are not conspicuous. Christ is set in the firmament of the spiritual heavens for the fall of these unhappy souls; He is to them "a savour of death unto death."[d] He is ever in Himself Loving and Merciful, "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."[e] But in all generations there are souls of whom He says in sorrow, "If I had not come and spoken to them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloke for their sin."[f] He is "set," against the tenor of His own Blessed Will, for the fall of many.

[a] Rom. vii. 9–11. [b] 2 St. Pet. ii. 21. [c] St. Matt. xxvi. 24.
[d] 2 Cor. ii. 16. [e] 2 St. Pet. iii. 9. [f] St. John xv. 22.

III.

But our Lord was also set for the "rising again of many in Israel." This was His original purpose in coming; a purpose which was only limited in its operation by the free, yet perverted, wills of men. When He had His own way with souls, it was to raise them to newness of life. He did not merely promote this rising again; He was the Resurrection. "I am the Resurrection and the Life."[a] To come into true contact with Him was to touch a Life so intrinsically buoyant and vigorous, that it transferred itself forthwith into the attracted soul, and bore it onward and upward. "Risen with Christ,"[b] is an expression applied by St. Paul to Christians on this side the grave; and the "rising of many in Israel" was not the future resurrection of the body, but the present moral and spiritual resurrection of the soul. Something like this power is exerted upon us, but in an infinitely restricted sense by eminently good men; they do by their mere presence, their looks, their words, their unconscious ways, draw those of us who are privileged to be with them upwards towards that world in which they habitually live. In our Lord's case, while He was on earth, this power which went out of Him was unlike any witnessed before or since; and He exerts it still, though from the Invisible World, and through agencies which appeal less powerfully to imagination, or rather, to sense.

The Gospels tell us of several for whose "rising again" Christ was set. It was true of each disciple that persevered. It was conspicuously true of the Magdalen, whom He rescued from the grasp of seven devils; and of Peter, who denied Him; and of Thomas, who would not for awhile

[a] St. John xi. 25. [b] Col. iii. 1.

believe His Word. But in none of His servants is this attractive power of the Redeemer, mighty to raise from sin and death, more gloriously displayed than in St. Paul. St. Paul had "fallen" so as to be, in his own estimate, the very "chief of sinners."[a] He had been a blasphemer and a persecutor;[b] he was not, he felt, even in later years, when he had long worked and suffered, meet to be called an Apostle, because he persecuted the Church of God.[c] But if our Lord provoked in him at first a bitter hostility, the time came when He inspired His fanatical opponent with a passionate affection which controlled all the faculties of his being. The point at which this great change took place is called his "conversion;" in Simeon's language, it was his "rising again" after his "fall." Thus, in his own person, St. Paul experienced this double effect of the Advent of Christ into the world: first, the repulsion, which made him so bitter a persecutor; and next, the attraction, which made him so glorious an Apostle. First the fall, then the resurrection.

This double experience of St. Paul's has been repeated since. St. Augustine was a second great example of it. And it is a happiness to think that many in our modern world, who are speaking and living in opposition to our Lord Jesus Christ, may be in the case of Paul and Augustine in their earlier days. They have, from whatever cause, taken fright at religion. They have been repelled by some caricature of it, or by some inconsistency on the part of its professors, or by taking only one aspect of its doctrines and claims into consideration, or by a sense of their personal inability to comply with its demands upon the heart and conscience. But Christ is still throned in the firmament of the heavens, not merely for the fall, but for the rising again of many a

[a] 1 Tim. i. 15. [b] *Ib.* 13. [c] 1 Cor. xv. 9.

soul. It is to be hoped that brighter days await these wanderers, many of whom are children of the Kingdom, who have lost their way and will not lose it for ever. A nearer sight, a more constraining sense of the Divine Redeemer's claims, will come. When men see that He can and does give, by His Spirit, love, joy, peace, patience,[a] to those who ask Him; when they take into account the works which He did, the words which He spoke, the impression which He made while He was here on earth; when they see that the Society which He founded, the Creed which radiates from and centres in His Person, is more widely accepted now, eighteen centuries after His death, than ever before; they may reconsider their prejudices. They may say less than they mean when they admit that there is something to be said for Christianity, after all. They may rise from the tomb into which they had fallen—the tomb of doubt, of carelessness, of evil-living—into the glorious liberty of the children of God. May God grant it!

My brethren, we are apt to think of Christ's First Coming as a thing past and gone; and so, in one sense, it is. Eighteen centuries and a half have passed since His visible coming, and yet He is with us now. He came to be with His people for all time. "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."[b] The Incarnation is a perpetuated fact; and the various relations of different souls to the Incarnate Christ which we study in the Gospels, are repeated in every generation of Christians. Peter, Thomas, Magdalen, Paul—ay, Judas too,—they are all with us: the names, the outer guise, is changed; the spiritual history is substantially the same. The conditions of the great problem of the relation of souls to Jesus Christ do not vary materially from age to age. He, our

[a] Gal. v. 22. [b] St. Matt. xxviii. 20.

Lord, is unchangeable; and human nature, both on its bad and its better sides, is what it has been.

Let us, then, try to reflect that the words of Simeon are still true, and that they suggest a grave question for every one of us. Christ is set for the rising and fall of many. Religion does not save us by the mere fact of our being brought into intimate contact with it. Religious knowledge, opportunities for prayer, wise friends, good books, will not necessarily help us to Heaven. They may act on us in more ways than one.

What is the case with each one of us? May we humbly hope that with the progress of time we have been more and more drawn towards the Person of our Lord? Or are we conscious of a weakened desire to live near Him and for Him; of a secret dislike of prayer and spiritual reading, which are sure to become intolerable burdens if they should cease to occasion true delight? Have we conquered enemies who once were formidable; or have we fallen back under the power of enemies who, we have flattered ourselves, were conquered once for all? Are our motives simpler, clearer, more uniform; or are they at best turbid and composite—a strange mixture of heavenly impulses and earthly resolves—a moral compromise at our very heart, in which the influences which come from below are steadily but surely getting the better of those which come from Heaven? In short, are we falling or rising in the atmosphere of souls; in that world of spirits which angels watch with the keenest interest; that world in which our real life, whether consciously or not, is lived, while we are preparing for an irreversible fall or a completed resurrection? Surely this is a question for Advent. We must sooner or later look the greatest of all our responsibilities in the face; our responsibility for having known whatever we individually have

known of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. That is the talent of talents for which the Great Householder will call us most strictly to account.

Christ is set for the fall or rising of each single human being in this Cathedral; but His Will is that we all should rise. Let us not baulk His gracious purpose. Rather, while yet we may, let us cling, by faith and love and sincere repentance, to His Pierced Hands; that we may have a part in the First Resurrection, and, by His Grace, in the Second beyond it.

SERMON XXI.

THE PRINCE OF PEACE.

(FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT.)

Isa. ix. 6.

The Prince of Peace.

THIS year[a] we have a very short Advent; for before we have done with the last Sunday of the season the Christmas Festival is upon us. Within a few hours Christendom will again be rejoicing in the Birth of the Divine Redeemer. A thousand choirs will chaunt the Hymn of the Angels; and all the families of mankind on which our Gracious Saviour has set the mark of His Redemption, will hasten with the early dawn of morning to associate themselves with the joys of Mary and of Joseph. As yet we are but on the brink of this strong, deep flood of devotion in which, year by year, every true heart throughout the Church of God rejoices for some few hours to escape from the toils and cares of our earthly existence; as yet the bells of Christmas have not burst upon our ears, and its accustomed anthems are but approaching us. But we can hardly go wrong if, this afternoon, our thoughts are given to the Great Event of to-night and to-morrow morning. That gracious Saviour Whose goodness and

[a] 1876, in which the Fourth Sunday in Advent fell on Christmas Eve.

condescension we celebrate will surely bless our early preparation for His Birthday; and we may already hail Him on His Manger Throne, receiving the worship of both earth and Heaven, in the words of the Prophet who announced Him, as the "Prince of Peace."

"The Prince of Peace!" This is the climax of the titles which were to belong to the mysterious Child Who, in the course of time, was to be born to Israel. Isaiah had before told King Ahaz that such a child would be born of a Virgin Mother, and would bear a name signifying the Divine Presence in the midst of Israel.[a] And now the Prophet beholds Him as already here. "Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given;" and he proceeds to enumerate His prerogative titles, which explain His dignity and His work. His Name shall be called "Wonderful;" His Birth is miraculous; He is Himself, when measured by the standard of common men, a standing miracle; His union of the Divine and the Human in a single Person is the very "mystery of godliness."[b] His second title is "Counsellor." As the Prophet says elsewhere, "The Lord of Hosts, wonderful in Counsel."[c] He is the Disinterested and All-Wise Adviser, to Whom in their perplexity His people may have free recourse. Again, He is "the Mighty God." His gentle intimacy with the race which He comes to bless and to save may not disguise the awful Majesty of His Eternal Person. If He takes on Him the form of a servant, He is not the less from all Eternity in the Form of God.[d] Thus, fourthly, He is "the Everlasting Father," or, more strictly, "the Father of Eternity;" before Him all that has been, is, and is to be, lies open, in its completeness; and He is the Author of blessings, innumerable and imperish-

[a] Isa. vii. 14.
[b] 1 Tim. iii. 16.
[c] Isa. xxviii. 29.
[d] Phil. ii. 6.

able, which are yet to come. And so, at last, in contemplating Him, the Prophet returns, as it were, from Heaven to earth. He is the High and Holy One, Who inhabiteth Eternity;[a] but for us, the children of time, He is the Author of one of the best blessings a fallen and distracted race can know; He is "the Prince of Peace."

"The Prince of Peace!" The princes of this world not unfrequently take their titles from districts with which they have no present relations whatever, and for some ancient, perhaps half-legendary, reason which has long lost the meaning which once it had. But here we have no such meaningless titular decoration. This Prince of Whom Isaiah speaks, introduces and establishes the reign of peace by the conquest of its enemies. For the word which is here translated "prince" is the very Hebrew word which is translated "captain" in the account of the vision of Joshua beneath the walls of Jericho;[b] and it corresponds to the Greek word in the phrases, "Captain of our salvation,"[c] "Author of our faith,"[d] which are applied to our Lord in the Epistle to the Hebrews.

The Bearer of this title, then, was not simply Himself to reign in a sphere or realm of peace; He was to enlarge and carry forward the range of its blessings; He was to be the Author of peace as well as the Lover of concord; He was to correspond in history to that word of prophecy—

> "Thus saith the High and Holy One That inhabiteth Eternity,
> Whose Name is Holy . . .
> 'I create the fruit of the lips;
> Peace, peace to him that is far off, and to him that is near.'"[e]

The coming into the world of such a Being as this Prince of Peace—Superhuman, yet closely bound up with

[a] Isa. lvii. 15. [b] Josh. v. 14, 15, שַׂר. [c] Heb. ii. 10.
[d] Heb. xii. 2. [e] Isa. lvii. 15, 19.

the fortunes and the race of man—was, from the first, present to the mind of those to whom God of old revealed His Will. When Adam's fatal act of disobedience had destroyed man's peace with God and with himself, there was a promise of One, the Seed of the woman, Who should bruise the head of man's spiritual enemy,[a] and restore thereby the reign of peace. Such a Visitant was foreshadowed, as we learn from the Epistle to the Hebrews, in that mysterious personage, the old priest-king Melchizedek.[b] He reigned in Salem, and the very name was significant;[c] he was, in his measure, a king of peace. Then the prophecy of Shiloh, "the tranquil one," pointed in the same direction;[d] and at one time it seemed as if the expected Prince had come in the person of King Solomon. His name, Shelomoh, meant "the peaceful monarch," in contrast with his warrior-father David. "He shall be," so ran the message, "a man of rest; and I will give him rest from his enemies round about: for his name shall be Solomon, and I will give peace and quietness unto Israel in his days."[e] And yet Solomon, as we know, was far from being the ideal Prince of Peace; nay, he was himself inspired, in the seventy-second Psalm, to describe a Monarch of Whose mighty and tranquil Empire his own was but a faint and passing shadow.

> "In His days shall the righteous flourish;
> Yea, and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth.
> His dominion also shall be from the one sea to the other,
> And from the flood unto the world's end.
> They that dwell in the wilderness shall kneel before Him:
> His enemies shall lick the dust."[f]

And thus, later on in Isaiah, we find that both the Righteous King announced by the Prophet in the earlier

[a] Gen. iii. 15. [b] Heb. vii. 3. [c] *Ib.* 2.
[d] Gen. xlix. 10. [e] 1 Chron. xxii. 9. [f] Ps. lxxii. 7–9.

days of his ministry, and "the Servant of the Lord" so constantly on his lips in his later days, meet in this hope and promise of a Prince of Peace. "The work of" the King's "righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of His righteousness quietness and assurance for ever."[a] On the other hand, upon the "Servant of the Lord" is the chastisement of our peace;[b] He endures the needful punishment in order to establish peace. As through His envoys He publishes peace, their feet, in the eyes of the Prophet, are beautiful upon the mountains[c] of the world; the covenant which He mediates with Heaven is a covenant of peace;[d] the officers of His Empire will be men of peace;[e] peace will be extended throughout it like a flowing stream;[f] great will be the peace of its children.[g]

It is not to be wondered at that a promise like this should have been heard and treasured, though in a distorted and imperfect form, among the pagan nations who dwelt around the People of Revelation. There were many echoes of it in the heathen world; and just before our Lord was born, there was one, specially famous, which would have entwined the distinctive glory of the Redeemer around the brow of an heir of the Empire of Rome.[h] Rome, too, had a peace of its own; "the Roman peace" was the dulcet phrase beneath which that proud empire of blood and iron disguised the hard realities of its world-wide rule. "They make a solitude, and call it peace:" such was the comment of the conquered races. The peace of forced submission, the peace of exhaustion, the peace of death,—these were not the peace of the

[a] Isa. xxxii. 17. [b] *Ib.* liii. 5. [c] *Ib.* 7. [d] *Ib.* liv. 10.
[e] *Ib.* lx. 17. [f] *Ib.* lxvi. 12. [g] *Ib.* liv. 13.

[h] Virg. *Ecl.*, iv. 15–17—

"Ille deum vitam accipiet divisque videbit
Permixtos heroas et ipse videbitur illis,
Pacatumque reget patriis virtutibus orbem."

promised Prince for Whom Israel hoped. But the phrase was worth something, nevertheless; it was the homage of a world feeling after God; feeling for a Deliverer Who alone could bring relief to its unresting misery.

Accordingly, when our Lord Jesus Christ was born into the world, the angels sang, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace."[a] When He was taking leave of His disciples before He suffered, "Peace," He said, "I leave with you, My peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you."[b] When He had risen from the grave, and appeared in the midst of His Apostles in the upper chamber, His blessing ran thus, "Peace be unto you."[c] When an Apostle would describe the essential note of the Kingdom of Christ in the soul of man, he names "righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost."[d] But this peace was not to be bestowed at random and indiscriminately. "Think ye," said its Author, "that I am come to send peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division."[e] Before peace was possible, there must be a struggle and a victory; there must be division and reconciliation. Peace was not the first effort of the work of Christ, but its flower and crown. This is the more important to note, in view of some difficulties which appear to confront us when we proceed to inquire how far the Prince of Peace has made good His title.

What, then, is the sphere or scene in which we may meet with the Peace of Christ?

I.

Is it the civilized world; so much of the world as owns, however hesitatingly, the Christian Name? Is it

[a] St. Luke ii. 14. [b] St. John xiv. 27. [c] *Ib.* xx. 19.
[d] Rom. xiv. 17. [e] St. Luke xii. 21.

the world at large? Undoubtedly, brethren, to establish peace in this sphere, on this scale, is our Blessed Master's ultimate aim. Peace between families, between nations, between races; peace between classes and interests which are hostile in virtue of a long tradition; peace, not "at any price," but at the price of mutual self-sacrifice; this is in some form or other, at some date or other, to be the work of the Divine Redeemer. In that description of the completed establishment of the Kingdom of Christ, at the beginning of Isaiah, which precedes the description of the Final Judgment, Peace is the climax of the predicted triumph. The prophet begins—

> "And it shall come to pass in the last days,
> That the mountain of the Lord's house
> Shall be established in the top of the mountains,
> And shall be exalted above the hills;
> And all nations shall flow unto it.
> And many people shall go and say,
> Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,
> To the house of the God of Jacob;
> And He will teach us of His ways,
> And we will walk in His paths:
> For out of Zion shall go forth the law,
> And the Word of the Lord from Jerusalem."[a]

And then, describing the result of this spontaneous pressing of the nations into the Church of Christ, the prophet continues—

> "And He shall judge among the nations,
> And shall rebuke many peoples:
> And they shall beat their swords into ploughshares,
> And their spears into pruning-hooks:
> Nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
> Neither shall they learn war any more."[b]

[a] Isa. ii. 2, 3. [b] *Ib.* 4.

As a poet of our time has condensed the picture—

> "Down the dark future, through long generations,
> The sounds of war grow fainter, and then cease;
> And like a bell with solemn sweet vibrations,
> I hear the Voice of Jesus Christ say, 'Peace!'" [a]

Here it is impossible not to stop and ask, Where is the present counterpart to all this? What is the reality? What are the ideas, the aspirations, the passions, of our day? What is its language? What are the prospects and anticipations with which, at this present moment, we are increasingly familiar? Does not everything around us speak of possible, perhaps I should say of probable, and widely extended war? Is not this the topic of public conversation when we men meet together? Is it not the constant subject of discussion in our public prints? Does it not fill the air, not in this country only, but in every country throughout Europe? Do we not hear of negotiations which scarcely hope to do more than avert or limit the range of the threatened struggle? Do we not hear of vast armaments, to the extent and resources of which each day that passes makes serious additions, intended to promote war on a gigantic scale? Is not the reverse of the Prophet's language nearer the literal fact? Are not ploughshares being beaten into swords, and pruning-hooks into spears, in half the nations of the civilized world? And then, when attention has been called to the discrepancy between the prophecy and the actual, the appalling fact, another set of questions appear upon the scene. May not this state of things prove that Christianity is a failure? Does it not show that its Creed has no access to the springs of human action, no power to mould the course of human history? Must we

[a] Longfellow.

not admit that the documents to which Christianity appeals as its credentials are in fact its condemnation; that these very documents, these inspired poems, these splendid aspirations towards the impossible, have only placed before the world a glorious Ideal, which has not been, and cannot be, realized?

No, brethren; it is not so. The Prince of Peace works in the centuries; He takes His time. As it was in the days of His Flesh, so it is in history. He teaches men as they are able to bear His teaching.[a] Not by sudden revolutions, but through the slow and gradual emergence and victory of principles does He make captive the powers of the world. Slavery was from the first implicitly condemned to abolition by the essential principles of the Gospel. But it was tolerated and emptied of its characteristic evils by the great Apostles;[b] while it has only disappeared, even from the Christian world, if it has disappeared, in this nineteenth century. And as with slavery, so with war. War is condemned by the spirit and drift of our Lord's teaching, although the New Testament seems, in a sense, to recognize it by laying down the duties of soldiers, just as it seems to recognize slavery by prescribing the duties of masters and slaves. But war, so an Apostle teaches us, as a rule, has its origin in unregulated human desires;[c] and when all hearts and minds, or those of the majority, are brought into the obedience of Christ,[d] war will become impossible. Meanwhile, until this is the case, war is not only possible, it is sometimes necessary. If war for selfish aggrandizement, or for the many unworthy objects which

[a] St. Mark iv. 33.

[b] Eph. vi. 5–9; Col. iii. 22—iv. 1; 1 Tim. vi. 1–4; Tit. ii. 9, 10; 1 St. Pet. ii. 18–25.

[c] St. James iv. 1.

[d] 2 Cor. x. 5.

may be vaguely, although wrongly, described as essential to national interests or national honour, is indefensible on Christian principles; war to punish a great wrong, or to bring deliverance to the oppressed, may be a Christian duty; just as much a duty in a nation as it would be a duty in a high-minded man to come to the assistance of a woman or a child whom he saw maltreated in the street by a vigorous ruffian. For purposes like this, in well-known words, it is lawful for a Christian man to "wear weapons and serve in the wars;" [a] that is, when war is the instrument of justice, or the herald of mercy. Only when "the kingdoms of the world have become the kingdoms of God and of His Christ;" [b] only when hearts and minds have been penetrated, to an extent from which we are far removed as yet, with the principles of the Everlasting Gospel, will war become literally impossible; only then will the vision be realized, "He maketh wars to cease in all the world; He breaketh the bow, and knappeth the spear in sunder, and burneth the chariots in the fire." [c]

Meanwhile, do not let us try to escape the difficulty by saying that Christian principles are very excellent for individual men, but are inapplicable to the conduct of nations. To say that is high treason against the authority of Christ. If the rules of life which He taught us are really authoritative, they ought to control the conduct of nations not less than the conduct of private persons like you and me. Nations, after all, have no existence independent of the human beings who compose them; nations are only large companies of men and women; and what is right or wrong for each individual who helps to make up a nation, must be right or wrong for all such persons

[a] Art. XXXXII. [b] Rev. xi. 15.

[c] Ps. xlvi. 9.

collectively. Moral obligations do not evaporate in a crowd; and Christ our Lord assuredly meant His moral teaching to enter into and control the conduct of nations; in other words, to control politics. No; if as yet this is not the case; if men who would shrink from wrong in their individual capacity advocate it as members of a corporation, or as citizens or rulers of a State, this only shows how much our Lord has yet to do in order to make even the Christian world really His. But if He delays His work, this is no proof that He will not complete it, or that, in the end, the world will not be subject to the Prince of Peace.

II.

Is the Christian Church, then, the sphere in which we may contemplate the Peace of Christ? This is not an unreasonable expectation; and here again prophecy has drawn a picture which might encourage it, and which haunts the conscience of our divided Christendom. Isaiah tells us how the Rod of the stem of Jesse would appear upon the earth as a perfect Discerner and Judge of men—

> "The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him,
> The spirit of wisdom and understanding,
> The spirit of counsel and might,
> The spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord;
> And shall make Him of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord:
> And He shall not judge after the sight of His eyes,
> Neither reprove after the hearing of His ears:
> But with righteousness shall He judge the poor,
> And reprove with equity the meek of the earth."[a]

And, as a consequence of this appearance of a perfect Critic of men, perfect in His knowledge of them, perfect

[a] Isa. xi. 2–4.

in His fairness and consideration when dealing with them, there would be an attraction of classes and characters and tempers the most divergent to His Presence and His Feet; there would be a gathering together of those who had always been separate, and a reconciliation of those who were traditionally hostile; nature would be conquered, almost reversed, by the energy of Grace.

"The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb,
And the leopard shall lie down with the kid;
And the calf and the young lion and the fatling together;
And a little child shall lead them.
And the cow and the bear shall feed;
Their young ones shall lie down together:
And the lion shall eat straw like the ox.
And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp,
And the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice's den.
They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain:
For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord,
As the waters cover the sea." [a]

The secret of this union of the unlike, of this intimacy between the incompatible, of this congregation into one of all that is opposed in human character and by natural sympathy, is to be found, so the Prophet proceeds again to teach, in Him Who is Common Attraction and Centre of all—

"And in that day there shall be a Root of Jesse,
Which shall stand for an ensign of the people;
To it shall the Gentiles seek:
And His Rest shall be glorious." [b]

And we seem to catch the historical counterpart of all this when we are told by the author of the Acts of the Apostles that "all that believed were together, and had all things common," [c] and that "the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he

[a] Isa. xi. 6–9. [b] *Ib.* 10. [c] Acts ii. 44.

possessed was his own; but they had all things common."[a] And in the same sense St. Paul insists on the virtual disappearance of all distinctions of class, and country, and station, and even sex, in the new unity, which was higher and stronger than any natural bond; the unity of the faithful in the Body of Christ. To the Colossians he writes, "There is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all."[b] To the Galatians, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus."[c] To the Ephesians, "He is our Peace, Who hath made both Jew and Gentile one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; having abolished in His Flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in Himself of twain one new man, so making peace."[d] And later on, to the same Church at Ephesus, "There is one Body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called to one Hope of your calling; one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of all, Who is above all, and through all, and in you all."[e]

And now we turn from the prophetic forecast and the Apostolic description to the actual Christendom which lies around us, and in which we live and work. Where is now the unity of the Prophet and the Apostle; where is the superhuman peace which was to awe, which once did awe, individual self-assertion into joyful harmony? What is the spectacle which meets our eyes but one of widespread anarchy and confusion, in which the forces which should be directed with concentrated energy to further the conversion of the heathen and the salvation of

[a] Acts iv. 32. [b] Col. iii. 11. [c] Gal. iii. 28.
[d] Eph. ii. 14, 15. [e] *Ib.* iv. 4–6.

the world, are spent, if not altogether, yet with prodigal wastefulness, upon internecine conflicts? Do we not behold an almost hopeless rivalry between the greater divisions of the Christian Church; do we not find within the limits of the fragments which compose it subdivisions of opinion and sympathy which threaten to tear into shreds what yet remains of organic coherence? Must we not mark how these divisions are made the most of by those who would fain cast out as evil our Blessed Master's Name; how they are exaggerated, and intensified by the exaggeration; how they form the most effective of current arguments against Christianity? It seems natural, as we gaze on this spectacle of anarchy, to cry out with an old Psalmist, surveying the ruins of an earlier age, "Thou hast brought a vine out of Egypt: Thou hast cast out the heathen, and planted it. Thou madest room for it, and when it had taken root it filled the land. The hills were covered with the shadow of it, and the boughs thereof were like the goodly cedar trees. She stretched out her branches unto the sea, and her boughs unto the river. Why hast Thou then broken down her hedge, that all they that go by pluck off her grapes? The wild boar out of the wood doth root it up, and the wild beasts of the field devour it. Turn Thee again, Thou God of Hosts: look down from Heaven, behold, and visit this vine." [a]

There are those who would escape from the misery of contemplating the lacerations of the actual Christian Church, by assuming that one of its fragments represents the whole; that a vigorous absolutism which can only silence where it would fain convince represents the moral unity of Pentecost; that an Ecclesiastical monarchy which has been slowly built up during the course of ages by a long line of mitred statesmen, can claim for its sanction the

[a] Ps. lxxx. 8–14.

authority of our Lord. And there are others who seek to satisfy the language of Scripture by inventing a second and invisible Church, distinct altogether from the Church visible and militant, to which Scripture language, they think, may yet apply, but of which Scripture itself, closely questioned, says absolutely nothing. And others there are who, seeing how unsatisfactory are each of these expedients, give up as hopeless the vision of unity, and pronounce Christianity, considered as an attempt to organize the spiritual life of the human race, a proved failure.

My brethren, Christ, the Prince of the Peace of the world in future times, is also, we may well believe, the Prince of a future Peace in His divided Church. In its earlier days, and for years afterwards, He has shown what He can do for its rest and unity; although it is to be noted that under the very eye of His Apostles there were fierce divisions, like those at Corinth,[a] rending the unity of the Sacred Fold. Certainly, He has not forced visible unity upon His servants, any more than He has forced sanctity upon them. And the consequence has been that as in some centuries the witness of sanctity has been obscured among Christians, so, in others, that of unity has been suspended, or for the time forfeited. But Christ the Prince of Peace remains, as the pledge of a present capacity for union among His followers, and the earnest of its coming restoration. He is like the sun in the heavens, upon whose face men who inhabit different continents, who never saw each other, who speak different tongues, who never think of each other at all, or only with thoughts of hatred and suspicion, yet gaze with a common thankfulness and joy, as upon the source of their common blessings. One day that sun shall lighten their path towards each other, and shall enable them to do

[a] 1 Cor. i. 12.

justice to that human unity which embraces them all. So is it also with the Sun of Righteousness.[a] The nearer separated Churches draw to Him, in faith, in repentance, in prayer, in Sacraments, the nearer most assuredly do they draw towards each other; the nearer are they to that moment when they will again glorify and praise the reconciling power of the Prince of Peace. "He is our Peace," they will exclaim, "Who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us." [b]

III.

Is, then, the life of the individual Christian the sphere in which we may look for the Peace of Christ? Yes, brethren, here it is that the Prince of Peace, from the first and until now, has set up His Standard, has established His Empire. Here He has always reigned; and for a reason which it is easy to recognize. The reign of the Prince of Peace in a single soul depends upon the loyal disposition of a single will; His reign in the Church, and still more in the world at large, depends upon the dispositions of millions of wills. But the conditions of the peace of the single soul are so simple as to ensure its continued reproduction, and in every generation of Christians the promise has been abundantly fulfilled, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee: because he trusteth in Thee." [c]

Like the peace of the world and the peace of the Church, this peace of the soul, if it is to last, must be based on righteousness. It cannot be infused into a soul that clings to sin. It cannot be imposed by force upon a soul which fosters insurrectionary passions. It is im-

[a] Mal. iv. 2. [b] Eph. ii. 14. [c] Isa. xxvi. 3.

possible where unrenounced sin has thrown everything into disorder; where riot reigns in an untamed will, in undisciplined desires, in a conscience whose protests cannot be silenced or drugged, in a sustained conflict between the dictates of inclination, and not merely the sense of duty, but even the sense of interest. Peace is impossible when the past, and the present, and the future, alike suggest dissatisfaction and anxiety; when to look backwards is to recall much which it would be a blessing, but which it is impossible, to blot out; when to look at what is passing is to feel that what has been still continues; when to look onwards is to expect some inevitable retribution, for which at any moment the hour may sound. "There is no peace, saith my God, for the wicked."[a] "The peace of God, which passeth all understanding," keeps "hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord;"[b] hearts and minds which are based on righteousness. "The work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever."[c] The Righteousness of Christ, the New and Perfect Man, claimed on our part by faith, imparted on His by the gifts of grace, is the basis in the soul of true and lasting peace; peace between the soul and God, peace between the several faculties and powers of the soul itself. There is peace between the Father in Heaven and the living members of His Incarnate Son. And in the true Christian soul there is no standing war between intellect and feeling, between conscience and inclination, between passion and reason, between thought and faith. Misunderstandings are transient, peace is the order of the day. Peace in the understanding, which, being fixed on the Eternal and Unchanging Truth, escapes the misery of being "carried

[a] Isa. xlviii. 22. [b] Phil. iv. 7. [c] Isa. xxxii. 17.

about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive."[a] Peace in the affections, which, like spring flowers, have opened to the sunshine of the Eternal Beauty, and cannot now be won by any created rival that, at the best, is a poor and pale reflection of their true Object. Peace in the will, which is strongly and undeviatingly bent upon obeying its true Master, and finds in the absence of distracting objects, not only its excellence, but its repose.

From this peace of Christ in the Christian soul, peace radiates gradually but surely into the Church and the world at large. "The Prince of Peace" works, as at the first, through those souls whom He has made His own. Through them He reaches and leavens the mass around. Any of us can contribute something to His work, or can refuse the contribution. And each soul that is at peace with itself and with God, works thereby for the cause of universal peace; works for the harmony of the Church and of the world; works for the credit and glory of the "Prince of Peace."

It is a good rule, they say, to have some one particular prayer at each Communion, upon which the whole effort and force of the soul should be concentrated. At such times, we know, prayers have especial power with God; and it is a matter of prudence to make the most of them. How can we do better to-morrow, on our Lord's own Birthday, than ask Him to illustrate by new gifts and mercies His glorious Prophetic Title, the "Prince of Peace"? Ask Him, while yet the scourge of war is delayed, for peace, if it may be, among the nations; a peace which shall be lasting, because built, not on feeble complicity with wrong, but on provision for the claims of

[a] Eph. iv. 14.

mercy and of righteousness. Ask Him, in these days of ecclesiastical quarrels and controversies, for peace in the Church; in the whole Church, and in our own branch of it; a peace grounded, not on enforced reconciliations and enforced submissions, but on truth and justice; so that the world may know, better, at any rate, than it knows now, that the Father hath sent Him.[a] Ask Him, lastly, for peace, an increased and abundant peace, in your own souls; a peace secured by your hold on His Truth and His Righteousness; a peace which will stand unshaken in the hour of death and in the Day of Judgment. Ask Him for that peace which the world cannot give;[b] that both your hearts may be set to obey His commandments, and also that, being defended by Him from the fear of your enemies, you may pass your time in rest and quietness,[c] and may at last reach your Eternal Home.

[a] St. John xvii. 21. [b] *Ib.* xiv. 27.
[c] The Second Collect at Evening Prayer.

SERMON XXII.

THE THIEF IN THE NIGHT.

(FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT.)

1 THESS. V. 2.

The Day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night.

MANY of us must have wondered sometimes at the boldness of this comparison, in which the Second Coming of our Holy and Gracious Saviour is compared with the act of the felon who breaks into a man's house at night with intent of plunder and violence. If Scripture did not warrant the figure, we should not, we think, have ventured on it. Nay, it may be that an inspired Apostle would hardly have held this language if his Lord and Master had not led the way. The comparison is, in fact, suggested by our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and He uses it for a very simple purpose. A simile in Scripture is meant to illustrate some single point; and to make any larger application of it is to fall into mistakes more or less serious. Here it is not the moral character of the thief, but his way of doing his work, which are in question. In His great discourse on the destruction of the Temple and the end of the world, just before His Sufferings, our Lord had bidden His disciples, "Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth

come. But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. Therefore," he adds, "be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of Man cometh."[a] St. Luke reports the same words as spoken by our Lord,[b] but, as might well have been the case, on a different occasion. Our Lord does not say, in so many words, that the Last Day will come as a thief comes in the night; He only refers to the precautions which a prudent householder might take against a thief, as an illustration of the duty of Christians to watch and prepare for the Last Day. St. Paul puts into words that which is implied in the Words of Christ, when he says that between the circumstances of the Second Advent and the inroad of the thief at night, there is, at any rate, some kind of common ground or resemblance.

I.

"The Day of the Lord!" By this expression must be meant a day which will be, in some unique and pre-eminent sense, His Day. Of course, all days are really "days of the Lord;" His days Who is the Lord of Time and the Lord of Life. "The day is Thine, and the night is Thine: Thou hast prepared the light and the sun."[c] All time, like all space, is necessarily within the domain of the Infinite and Eternal Being; and in this sense, day by day, He makes the outgoings of each morning and evening to praise Him.[d] He cannot be restricted to any one period, as though it alone were His; as though other days belonged of right to some human, or at any rate created, proprietors. By "the Day of the

[a] St. Matt. xxiv. 42–44.
[b] St. Luke xii. 39, 40.
[c] Ps. lxxiv. 16.
[d] *Ib.* lxv. 8.

Lord," to Whom all days of right belong, is meant that day on which He will take the first place in the thoughts of His creatures. This is the natural sense of similar phrases, in the language of common life as well as of the Bible. When we speak of the Day of Austerlitz, or the Day of Waterloo, we mean those particular days which will ever be associated in history with the great battles that were fought on them. When a later Psalmist speaks of the "day of Jerusalem,"[a] he means the fatal day of its humiliation and ruin. When Isaiah refers to "the day of Midian,"[b] he is thinking of its memorable overthrow. In these, and like expressions, a day is appropriated to a particular subject, because on that day, for whatever reason, it has had or will always have a first place in the thoughts of men.

The "Lord's Day"[c]—the only New Testament name for Sunday—is so called because Christ, by His Resurrection, has made it His own; so that, on it, we Christians owe to Him, week by week, our first thoughts of gratitude and praise. "This is the day which the Lord hath made; let us rejoice and be glad in it."[d] And the "Day of the Lord," which is yet to come, is the day on which all thoughts will turn to Him, whether willingly or by constraint, whether in terror or in joy; the day on which His Throne of Majesty will supersede all human forms of power; when His Magnificence will dim all human splendour; when His Truth will silence all human errors and guesses; when His Justice will overshadow all that is deemed justice among the sons of men; a day in which everything else but He will so be lost sight of, as to be as though it were not; in which the eternal reality of His relation to the world and to men will also be the acknowledged reality. As the Evangelical Prophet has just told

[a] Ps. cxxxvii. 7. [b] Isa. ix. 4. [c] Rev. i. 10. [d] Ps. cxviii. 24.

us,[a] "The loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be made low: and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day."

"The Day of the Lord!" We know it by a more familiar name, given it on three occasions by our Lord Himself, and on three, at least, by His Apostles. It is the Day of Judgment. It is the Day on which He will bring the vast and complex moral account between Himself and the human race to a close, to a final and irreversible decision. Certainly He is always judging us, as He is always upholding us in life, always watching and always guarding us. Moment by moment, from our first hours of real responsibility to our last breath, the successive variations of our exact moral condition have been registered, with faultless accuracy, in the Eternal Mind. It is not to be supposed for an instant that a day is yet to come on which, like some human judge on the circuit, He will discover for the first time, by some laborious legal process, by arguments pleaded before Him, or from witnesses examined, what manner of men we severally are. "Thou art about my path, and about my bed, and spiest out all my ways. For lo, there is not a word in my tongue, but Thou, O Lord, knowest it altogether."[b] But on that day, the Day of the Lord, the Day of Judgment, what is always true will become, so to speak, visible, palpable, acknowledged; will inflict itself with terrific and resistless force upon the reluctant senses and imaginations of men. "When the Son of Man shall come in His glory, and all His Holy Angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the Throne of His glory: and before Him shall be gathered all nations: and He shall separate them one from the other, as a shepherd divideth the sheep from the goats."[c] "The

[a] Isa. ii. 17. First Lesson for the Evening Service, Advent Sunday.
[b] Ps. cxxxix. 2, 3. [c] St. Matt. xxv. 31, 32.

Lord Himself shall descend from Heaven with a shout, with the voice of the Archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first."[a] "Every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him: and all the kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him."[b] "We must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ; that every man may receive for the things done in the body, according to that which he hath done, whether it be good or bad."[c]

"The Day of the Lord!" They tell us that this is only the Christian form of the old fables of paganism about Minos and Rhadamanthus. It were better to say that those pagan fables were broken rays spreading through the kingdom of darkness from an original truth taught to man's natural conscience; a truth which Christendom has since received in its fulness from the Father of Lights. The pagan fable about the Judgment is related to Christ's revelation of the Judgment, just as the pagan Olympus is related to the Christian Heaven; just as the dread of an after-world of punishment, which haunts the conscience and literature of paganism through so many centuries, is related to the Scripture revelation of Hell. On this side is the truth, on that its mutilation, or its caricature, or its dim presentiment amid the clouds and the darkness. But the original truth is not less true because it is buried here or there beneath the typical forms of heathen error; it is the human conscience, after all, taught by God's primitive revelation of Nature, which, in some distant age, has so buried it. The Church does but give clear, full expression to a certainty of which heathenism is always more or less mindful—the certainty that all men will and must be judged,—when with St. Paul at Athens she proclaims that God "hath appointed a day, in which He will

[a] 1 Thess. iv. 16. [b] Rev. i. 7. [c] 2 Cor. v. 10.

judge the world in righteousness by that Man Whom He hath ordained; whereof He hath given assurance unto all men, in that He hath raised Him from the dead."[a]

II.

And this "Day of the Lord will come," we are told, "as a thief in the night." What are the ideas which this comparison is meant or calculated to suggest to us?

1. "As a thief in the night." To most men this comparison will be suggestive, first of all, of fear. A thief enters a house at night under circumstances and with an object which create natural alarm. He knows what he wants; he is aided by the darkness; he is prepared to carry out his purpose; he has anticipated resistance; he has taken his measures. Even if he should meet a man upon the staircase as brave and as well-prepared as himself; even if he has, in the end, to escape without effecting his object; his coming cannot but be regarded with a great deal of apprehension and disquiet.

And the first class of feelings which must arise at the thought of the Second Coming of Christ will be of the same character. The old prophets Joel and Malachi, when, gazing beyond the horizons of nearer judgments, they descried the coming Day of Universal Doom, spoke of it as "the great and terrible Day of the Lord,"[b] or "the great and dreadful Day."[c] And we, with the Gospels in our hands, cannot but echo their language; we cannot but own that we, too, are "afraid of God's judgments"[d] thus more definitely revealed.

Yes! it is certain—since God's Word is pledged thereto—that a day will come in which the fear of the Lord

[a] Acts xvii. 31. [b] Joel ii. 31. [c] Mal. iv. 5. [d] Ps. cxix. 20.

and the glory of His Majesty will be brought before His creatures as never before. We shall witness that day, each one of us; the old and young, the foolish and the wise, the saved and the lost. As surely as we have seen this day's sunlight, we shall hereafter behold the Eternal Judge upon His Throne, the countless multitudes before Him, the division between His creatures—deep and impassable—the disciplined activities of the angels, the issues, on this side and on that, as all gradually settles down into the final unchangeable award. Great artists have dared to pourtray that day; in a past age Michael Angelo; in this, Cornelius. But in presence of that scene the highest genius is powerless; it must content itself at best with snatches of bliss and of agony; with glimpses and fragments of a scene too vast, too sublime, too terrific, to submit to the conditions even of the highest art. Scripture is always far in advance of anything that art can attempt on such a subject; and as we follow its disclosures, we exclaim—

> "Great God, what do I see and hear?
> The end of things created:
> The Judge of all men doth appear
> On clouds of glory seated:
> The trumpet sounds, the graves restore
> The dead which they contained before."

And we add, "I am afraid of Thy judgments."

But is this all? Surely no; the last word of the Gospel is not fear but love, not disquiet but peace. If we will, the Judge on His Throne may be our Friend and Saviour; and His Angels the ministers, not of justice, but of grace; and we, instead of calling on the mountains to fall on us and the rocks to cover us,[a] may be bold to look up and lift up our heads, knowing that

[a] Rev. vi. 15, 16.

our redemption draweth nigh.[a] "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth them. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that dieth, yea rather, that is risen again, Who is even at the Right Hand of God," to intercede and to pardon.[b] The question is, What are our relations to Him now; what our faith, our love, our repentance, our obedience? It is in the spring that the autumn crops are sown; it is in youth that the fortunes of life are shaped; it is during the years of time that men decide how they will meet the Judgment.

2. "As a thief in the night." A second truth which is suggested by this figure is the suddenness of Christ's Coming. Here is the contrast it will present to many of God's judgments in this life. They approach us with measured steps; we see them coming; we calculate the pace of their advance; we know, almost to a moment, when and how they will announce themselves. They reach us through the world of nature or of man; and the natural and human world lies open to our observation, and we know something of the laws that govern it. Take the three judgments which are not seldom put together in the Bible; war, famine, pestilence. Neither of these comes upon us as does a robber in the house at night. Before a war breaks out we mark the causes which are likely to provoke it; the antipathies of race, the aspirations or the wrongs of nations, the bias and influence of leading men, the pressure of circumstances, the drift of currents of popular feeling. The cloud darkens gradually before it bursts; at least, this is so generally the case, that the exception proves the rule. So with famine. We observe in particular conditions of the atmosphere that which

[a] St. Luke xxi. 28. [b] Rom. viii. 33, 34.

will produce a failure of the crops over a wide extent of country; and we know that this failure, in the absence of sufficient communications by land or water, will lead to famine in particular districts. Thus many months may elapse after the first apprehensions of the coming trial before its pressure is actually felt. So it is to a certain extent even with pestilence, or, at any rate, with a large number of fatal epidemic diseases. When the Asiatic cholera last visited this country, its gradual advance across Europe from city to city was noted, just as if it had been a great personage on his travels, whose movements might be anticipated, since he was clearly on his way to England. And we know that a hot season, or a great abundance of raw fruit, or bad sanitary arrangements in a crowded town, will bring fever in their train; and when the outbreak occurs, it is impossible to say that it is unexpected. Neither war, nor famine, nor pestilence comes on man, ordinarily speaking, like the thief in the night.

But with the Second Coming of Jesus Christ it will be otherwise. There are, indeed, certain signs visible to the skilled sight of faith, but unobserved by those who walk by sight; signs which will precede the Advent; signs in the world of thought and in the world of matter; widespread intellectual confusion, political and social perplexity, material ruin, "signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon earth distress of nations, and perplexity; men's hearts failing them for fear."[a] Nay, as St. Paul explained to the Thessalonians in his Second Letter, when they had understood his first words on the subject too narrowly, there will be a falling away from the Faith, and a personage will come who will embody all the hostilities towards God that are scattered throughout human nature and history.[b] No person answering to

[a] St. Luke xxi. 25, 26. [b] 2 Thess. ii. 3–10.

the Apostle's description of the Antichrist would seem as yet to have appeared, though thoughtful and religious minds may and do recognize in the present circumstances of the world some signs of his approach. But his appearance and all that follows may well be sudden enough; and "he will be consumed by the breath of the Mouth of Christ, and destroyed at the Brightness of His Coming."[a] Thus, in reality, "of that day and that hour knoweth no man, but the Father Which is in Heaven."[b] We only know that it will come when men least expect it, and that it will be the fullest justification of the proverb, "Nothing is probable except the unforeseen." Are we looking out for it?

To keep watch for that which is certain, which will come unexpectedly, which will affect us most intimately, is only common sense. We know how it is in ordinary life. The case occurs to me of a man who has been told that a relation may return any day from a distant colony, and raise questions in the law courts which will imperil his own right to his property. The man cannot help giving a great deal of thought to this expected arrival. His mind reverts to the topic when he has nothing else to do. He looks nervously, morning by morning, at the list of ships which arrive and sail; he knows the main lines of packets by heart; he takes a new interest in the weather, in the telegraphic accounts of storms, in the accounts of recent voyages which other travellers have made. The whole subject is full of practical interest for him; his thoughts settle round it by a kind of mental gravitation, which needs no outward exhortation or impulse to second its force.

The Second Coming of Christ is much more certain than that of the colonist in question, who may die or

[a] 2 Thess. ii. 8. [b] St. Mark xiii. 32.

be drowned before he touches the shores of England. Christ's Coming is as certain as His Word is sure. But are we looking out for it? It may not come to us on this side of the grave; but it will practically have come to us at death. At once certain and uncertain—certain as to its reality, and uncertain as to its date—it bids us, at least, keep watch for it. A Christian's first practical anxiety should be expressed in his Master's words, "Lest coming suddenly He find" me "sleeping."[a]

3. "As a thief in the night." The figure suggests, thirdly, something which cannot be prevented by any efforts of our own. The man whose home is broken into may resist the thief; but he cannot ward off the attack by any preventive measures. To do this he must be in the confidence of his assailant; whereas, it is his assailant's purpose to keep him in the dark.

Here again there is a contrast between the Last Judgment and the visitations which I have already noticed. In view of the approach of war, famine, and pestilence, man is very far from powerless. Not merely can he do much to limit the range of these disasters; he can do much to prevent them. What is war? War is the product of human misconduct; of human ambitions, human greed, human cruelty, human injustice. Let these be curbed and cured by the advancing Gospel, and wars will become first rare, then impossible. What is famine? Famine is, at least not seldom, the consequence of want of foresight, bad communications, reckless administration, wasteful expenditure. As these are corrected by the industry and resolution of mankind, we may not say that famines will never occur; but they will be, in not a few cases, prevented. What is pestilence? Pestilence is

[a] St. Mark xiii. 36.

constantly the product of bad air, bad drainage, bad food, close and fetid dwelling-houses. It may be checked, nay, often arrested altogether, by that physical knowledge and skill which is so great a gift of God to our modern world; by removing the conditions which assist infection; by promptly confronting the first symptom of disease with its remedy or its antidote.

But, as against the Coming of Christ in the clouds of heaven, how can man take any precautions whatever? The causes which will determine that event lie as entirely beyond human control as do the movements of the planets. If we may observe, or think that we can observe, some of these causes, we can do nothing beyond observing them. We can, indeed, pray, "Lord Jesus, come quickly."[a] We can be "looking for and hasting to the coming of the Day of God,"[b] as the Apostle bids us. But we cannot prevent, if we would, the Inevitable; we can but prepare to meet it.

III.

Prepare to meet it! Are we doing this?

We may prepare for the Day of Judgment by judging ourselves in self-examination. We may erect, each of us in his own heart, a tribunal, and bid our acts, our words, our thoughts, our habits, our motives, our hopes, our fears, our passions, our shortcomings, our training and respecting of conscience, our loyalty to duty and principle, our relations to our dependents, friends, superiors, pass before it. In these inmost recesses of being, in moments of entire sincerity with self, we may hear, if we will, the echoes of the Voice of Christ in mercy or in

[a] Rev. xxii. 20. [b] 2 St. Pet. iii. 12.

condemnation, as that Voice will sound to us from the Judgment Throne. In view of the future which awaits us, no moments of life are better spent than those which we spend in endeavouring to anticipate the verdict of the Great Judge; in the solitude of our chambers, night by night, before we lie down to rest.

We may also prepare for the Day of Judgment by worship—public and private. Worship is the act by which the human soul places itself consciously in the Presence of the Eternal Judge. It has many other aspects and uses than this; but they are not now in question. Before the Christian worshipper, the Throne in Heaven, on which sits the Judge of all, is constantly present. We address Him as "Maker of all things, Judge of all men." Observe in the Psalms—those models of worship in all its aspects and for all time—how constantly the Judicial Majesty of God is before the Psalmist. "Judge me, O Lord, according to Thy Righteousness;" [a] "Arise, Thou Judge of the world;" [b]—these are the cries of the soul to Him Who will "judge the world with righteousness, and minister true judgment unto the people." [c] And what is our first act when we engage in the ordinary Morning and Evening Service of the Church? Is it not "to acknowledge and confess our manifold sins and wickedness; and that we should not dissemble nor cloke them before the Face of Almighty God our Heavenly Father; but confess them with an humble, lowly, penitent, and obedient heart; to the end that we may obtain forgiveness of the same, by His Infinite Goodness and Mercy"? In the General Confession, accordingly, we place ourselves in spirit before the Judge, and tell Him, of our free will, what we are, and ask Him for grace and pity. And this,

[a] Ps. xxxv. 24. [b] Ps. xciv. 2. [c] Ps. ix. 8.

with all that follows—the acknowledgment of His Majesty in the Psalms, the listening to His warnings in the Lessons, the communion, however imperfect and poor, with Him Who, as the Eternal and the True, is beyond the senses, in the Prayers,—all this does prepare for judgment. It acclimatizes the soul to a region upon which it will enter decisively at death; it renders familiar the thoughts and acts which will alone be tolerable when we are before the Judgment-seat. And since in public worship we feel ourselves surrounded by a large company of souls, all presumably engaged in seeking the Face of Jesus Christ, in contrition first, and then in praise and supplication, the distinctive work of preparation for judgment is made easier by this association; here, close at our side, is, at any rate, a small portion of that great multitude which will be gathered one day, together with ourselves, before the Tribunal of the Redeemer.

Once more, we may prepare for the Day of Judgment by devoting one day in the year, or in six months, or in each month, as may be possible, to making, in a business-like way, an especial preparation for death. Death, like judgment, often comes as a thief. Death is only "the king of terrors"[a] because he is so often quite unprepared for. Death is the ante-chamber of the Judgment-hall; but, as far as we are individually concerned, our eternal state will have been already settled when we die. There may be, after death and before the General Judgment, an increase of light and peace to the faithful departed, such as is hinted at when St. Paul makes "the Day of Christ" alone the limit of progressive growth in the Christian soul;[b] but the question whether we are saved or lost will have been fixed at death. And, therefore, to prepare for death is

[a] Job xviii. 14. [b] Phil. i. 6.

a man's true and most serious business throughout life. No serious preparation for death will ever be made by those who do not make a business of making it. One day, from time to time, snatched from the busiest life, and devoted to self-examination, to prayer, to the review of old and to the formation of new resolutions; one day passed entirely with Jesus Christ our Crucified Redeemer, our future Judge, but now, if we will, our Friend and Helper; one day in which that which perishes is set aside, and the eye is fixed steadily, resolutely, on that which lasts; one day when we think over, one by one, that company of souls whom we have known, perhaps loved, here, and who have gone, with what results we know not certainly, across those dark waters to the brink of which we are hastening. Oh! depend upon it, to have a definite rule like this is light, hope, vigour, improvement. "Ye," says the Apostle, to the Thessalonians, "are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief."[a] God grant that it may be so with us too! But this must depend upon the use we make of what remains to us of time; it may be, of the very few years, or months, or weeks, or days, that do still remain of it to some of us.

[a] 1 Thess. v. 4.

SERMON XXIII.

THE GREAT ACCOUNT.

(SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT.)

ROM. XIV. 12.

So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.

LAST Sunday we were considering this question—What is implied about the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, when the Apostle compares it to the inroad of a thief in the night? It was only by the way that we touched on its main purpose, that is to say, the Final Judgment of all men; and the season of the Advent, and the importance of the matter itself, equally warrant us in returning to it to-day.

When St. Paul says that "every man shall give an account of himself to God," he makes one of the most solemn statements that are to be found even in his Epistles. He is led into making it, as we should say, quite incidentally; he wants to lay down a principle, which would check the rash judgments that were common among Christians at Rome in his day, respecting the private religious observances of their Christian neighbours. Some of the Roman Christians, it seems, were vegetarians; others ate anything they fell in with. Some of them observed private anniversaries; to others

all days were pretty much alike. As yet the Church had not laid down any rules about these matters for Christians; and no individual Christian might challenge another's liberty or judge another's conduct. "Why," asks the Apostle, "dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ. For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God. So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God."[a]

Here is a solemn truth, which must, we think, have at once lifted the thoughts of the Apostle's Roman readers above the controversies in which they were engaged, into a higher and a serener atmosphere. Whatever food they ate or did not eat, whatever days they did or did not observe, one thing was certain. They would have to give an account of the act or the omission, as of everything else in their lives. "Every one of us shall give account of himself to God."

I.

Here, then, we have, first of all, a broad statement as to something which every human being has to do. Every one of us has to give an account. When this account is to be given, where it is to be given, how it is to be given; these are questions of the highest interest. But for the moment we are looking only at the general fact of the accountability of man. This is the aspect in which, for the time, man presents himself to the Apostle; he has to give an account of himself. Certainly human nature has many sides, and other qualities or endowments than this have been reckoned man's distinguishing cha-

[a] Rom. xiv. 10–12.

racteristic. By one, man's gift of reason; by another, his possession of free-will; by a third, his capacity for social progress; by a fourth, his power of turning thought back upon itself, in other words, his capacity for reflection. The Apostle looks out upon human nature; he fixes his eye on the men and women whom he sees passing before him in the streets of an Asiatic or a Greek town; and he says to himself, "Each of these people has to give an account." Much else about them is solemn, interesting, attractive. But this one thing is more serious than all else; they have, each of them, before their destiny takes its final shape, to go through a scene of matchless importance, in itself and in its issues; they have to make answer for themselves to a Being Who knows all about them; they are, and, if they do not know it already, they will find themselves to be, responsible.

"Responsibility!" It is one of those great words which, if they are dwelt upon, shape the thoughts and wills and lives of men. There are not many such words in any language; words which have this high privilege of representing the deepest and most fundamental truths that can sway the soul of man. "Responsibility," however, is one such word, and "duty" is another. But, of the two words, "responsibility" is the more solemn and the more powerful. My duty is that which as a man, as a Christian, I have to do. My responsibility recalls the account which I must render for what I do, and for what I leave undone. Duty looks to the present; responsibility to the present and to the future. Duty may seem at first to represent the more disinterested of the two ideas; responsibility, human nature being what it is, is the more practically vigorous. "Duty" is a word which men may accustom themselves to use who have no exact answer to give to the question why duty is duty; why virtue is

right, and vice wrong; why industry, honesty, and self-sacrifice are praiseworthy, and sloth, deceit, and self-indulgence blamable. But "responsibility" is a word which no man would use thinkingly who has not a great deal to say upon these topics. A man who does not look beyond the grave, may talk in a vague yet sincere way about his duty, using that word of what he has to do in his present position, and perhaps in order to keep it. But no man talks of responsibility—in the serious sense of that term—who does not know and feel that "it is appointed unto men once to die, and after death the judgment."[a] England, we know, expects every man to do his duty, here and now. But St. Paul says, "Every one of us shall have to give an account of himself to God."

Not that a man need be a Christian in order to believe that he has to give an account of himself hereafter. The Moslems, for instance, believe this as sincerely as we do; and if this is one of the fragments of truth which they have borrowed from the Christian Scriptures, it is probably retained because man's natural conscience bears such striking witness to its justice.

It is impossible to believe in a Moral Ruler of the world, and to believe that He has made His last reckoning with every man on this side of the grave. There is too much of wronged innocence, too much of unpunished wrong, to allow of such a belief as this. If all ended here, the actual state of the world would make belief in One perfectly Good God all but impossible. It would force us, perhaps, to think of a god who was force and intelligence without being goodness; or of two beings, one good and one evil, not unequally matched in power, who made the world of men the scene of their struggles for mastery, and with very varying results. Wherever men have risen to

[a] Heb. ix. 27.

belief in a Moral God, they have necessarily believed also in some sort of future account, on the ground that the area of operations afforded by human life in this earthly sphere is apparently too confined to enable a perfectly Holy Being satisfactorily to vindicate within its frontiers His essential character of Justice in dealing with His moral creatures. Thus it is that we find the presentiment of judgment largely spread beyond the limits of the Church of God. Many of the better kind of heathen, from age to age, would have repeated thus far the Creed of the Apostle. "We men are responsible agents; every one of us shall give account of himself hereafter." Seneca did say, not merely that such an account was to be expected, but that the thought of it was a great help to virtuous action.

Who of us does not recognize the solemnity with which a man's life is invested, when some trial, or danger, or suffering, is known to be inevitable by himself and by those who are in his company? This is the secret of the interest with which a soldier is regarded when he is setting out for a campaign. We must have lately read accounts of the emotion with which the troops, departing to take a share in the struggle now going forward in the East, have been greeted by their countrymen. And the reason is, that however much the men who compose a regiment or a battalion may differ from each other in countenance, in bearing, in antecedents, in other claims on our notice, this is certain about all and each of them, that they will have to encounter the shock of battle, with all its tragic liabilities. That one clearly ascertained point of their impending destiny is the true secret of the interest with which we regard them; and we must have been conscious of the same feeling if, by any chance, we have ever had to visit a person who is under sentence of death. Whatever he may have been or may be, all is dwarfed in our

minds by the thought of the stern penalty which shortly awaits him, at a fixed hour, in a fixed place, at the hand of the law. And yet, if we would look at things as they are, there is every reason for extending this specific interest to every member of our race. Whatever else may be uncertain respecting the future of us who are assembled in this Cathedral, it is certain that, one and all of us, we shall die, and shall after death have to give an account. Of all men who have ever lived on this earth; of all who will live until the end comes; of all whom we have seen in life, it may be only once; of all of whom we have only heard; of those nearest and dearest to us, and those most remote, whether in age or station, or character, or occupations, one fact is equally true, and it invests every one of their lives with an equal solemnity. They will give an account hereafter.

II.

Every one of us, then, shall give an account; every one of us is responsible. But responsible for what? What is it respecting which we have to give the account? The Apostle answers this question by saying, "Every one of us shall give account *of or concerning himself.*[a]

What is the ground of this particular responsibility? Why is a man responsible for himself? Why shall we, each one of us, have to give an account of that which we do, and that which we leave undone; of that which we are, and of that which we are not, but might and should be; of that which we believe, and that which we do not, but could and should believe; of the motives which really sway us; of the passions which most powerfully affect us; of the influence which we exert on those around us, and

[a] περὶ ἑαυτοῦ.

which they in turn exert upon ourselves; of the drift and current of our lives, as they lie beneath an Eye Which surveys them from first to last, without prejudice, without passion, searchingly, unerringly?

The answer is, because all this is for us, more or less directly, a matter of choice. Our acts, our omissions, our moral character, our moral deficiencies, our faith, our failure to believe, our ruling motives, our ruling passions, our relations, active and passive, towards those around us, the course of our existence, be it upward or downward, are the result of choice. Acts of choice, carrying with them, more or less completely, the whole impetus of our being, and extending over some scores of years, it may be; millions upon millions of these acts, determining in a particular direction the general movement of our wills, have made us what we are. They have determined what we now do and what we omit to do; what we believe and what we reject; the direction in which we are tending, the abandonment of all that we are leaving more and more behind us.

Doubtless this is not the whole account of the matter. Each of us starts with a natural outfit, which helps us to a good choice or makes it difficult. Then, again, the opportunities of our several lives differ almost incalculably. And, as we Christians believe, the Grace of Baptism, and the assistance of the Holy Spirit, given again and again afterwards, though it does not act irresistibly, and force a man to Heaven against his will, yet is a great force on the right side. But, allowing for all this, we are in the main, and we shall be still more, what we have made ourselves; and on this account we are responsible. Responsibility goes hand in hand with power. No man is responsible for his size, or for the colour of his hair, or for the number of his brothers and sisters; these things are out of his power.

His responsibility begins when his power of choice begins; it varies with that power; and upon the use he makes of it will depend the kind of account which, sooner or later, he will have to give.

It will be, most assuredly, *of ourselves* that we each one of us shall have to give account. All of us die, yet we each of us die alone. We shall be judged in an innumerable company, yet we shall be judged singly. There will be no getting off, as in some human court of justice, under the cover of a great multitude, or in a universal scramble and confusion. To each one of us the Day of Account will be like the Love of God, in that, so far as we are concerned, it exists for ourselves alone, and so perfectly that for the moment we might suppose it to have no relation whatever to other beings.

"Every man shall give account *of himself*." It would not be difficult for many of us to give an account, more or less exhaustive, of others. We spend our time in thinking them over, talking them over, discussing them. We know, it may be, some true things about them; we suspect a great deal which is not true, but utterly false. To some of us, it may be, this discussion of others presents itself as at once an amusement and a relief. It is an amusement, for it costs us nothing to dwell on their failings; and human nature, when we have no immediate stake in it, is always amusing. And it is a relief. To talk about others keeps us at the circumference of our own life; far, very far away from the centre. We dread being near the centre; we do not wish to be with ourselves, within ourselves, alone with ourselves. There are wounds beneath the surface which we would not or dare not probe; there are memories from which we fly, if we can manage it, to something outside and beyond them. Yet, after all, it is of ourselves that we shall have to give account. Others will

only come into that account so far as they depend on us; so far as we may have wronged, or injured, or otherwise affected them. Their shortcomings may now take that place in our thoughts which ought to be given to our own. But a day will come when this will be impracticable. We shall be isolated before the Eternal Judge. We shall form part of a countless multitude, but He will deal with each one of us as if we stood alone before Him, and all the rays of His Infinite Wisdom and Justice were concentrated on our case.

III.

It is, then, of ourselves that we must, each one of us, give account. But to whom is this account to be given? Again the Apostle says, "Every one of us shall give account of himself to God."

It stands to reason, my brethren, that an account must be given, if given at all, to some person. Responsibility implies a person, to whom the responsible man is responsible. There is no such thing as responsibility, except in the language of poetry and metaphor, to an idea, or an abstraction, or a fancy in the air. A responsible man, I repeat it, is responsible to some person; whether to one or more persons, whether to a human or a superhuman person. All human society is based on and kept together by this law of responsibility to persons. We all know that servants are responsible to their masters, and children to their parents and teachers, and soldiers to their commanding officers, and the clerks in a great business house to the partners, and those who are dependent on others to those on whom they depend. Not that responsibility to persons is confined only to the young, or the employed, or the subordinate, or the dependent; not that responsi-

bility is found only at the base of society. On the contrary, the higher you mount the greater the responsibility, because, as we have already seen, responsibility implies power and grows with power, so that where there is most power there is most responsibility. In reality masters are more responsible than servants, and parents than children, and officers than the soldiers whom they command, and the heads of a great firm than the clerks in their employment, and employers and superiors generally than those whom they employ and who depend on them. But to whom do these highly placed people, more responsible because invested with more power, owe their debt of responsibility? Well, in some cases we still can follow the subject upwards, from one superior to another, from one depositary of responsibility to a greater, till we reach the summit. But to whom is the highest of all, the king, or head of the government, responsible? In what are called absolute monarchies he is practically responsible only to God; and if you could be certain of always having for a monarch a man of great wisdom and of entire integrity of purpose, perhaps this would be the simplest, the most useful, and beneficent kind of government. But as you cannot be certain of this, or, to speak more plainly, can only secure it very rarely indeed, it has happened that in all free countries, as they are called, government itself is made ultimately responsible to the common judgment of those whom it governs—responsible to the people. This has really been the principle of our English Constitution for nearly two centuries, and it illustrates the law on which society is based—that every man is responsible to some one else. Responsibility, then, is the law of human society; and yet there are always certain members of society who seem to escape it, to be somehow responsible to no one. Wealthy people, with no relations, who,

as they say, "can do what they like" with their money; idle people, with no duties or engagements, who have, as they put it, to kill time; clever writers or speakers, with no clear sense of truth or duty, who think that they may write or say just what occurs to them without let or hindrance;—if these men are really responsible, to whom are they responsible? So far as this world is concerned, they seem to go through it without having to answer to anybody.

If we could consider these cases in detail, we should, I think, see that the absence of any human person to whom responsibility is due is apparent only, and not real. But, be this as it may, most assuredly there is One Being to Whom all must give account of themselves, sooner or later; both those who have to give account to their fellow-men, and those who seem in this life to escape all real responsibility whatever. One such Being, I say, there is to Whom we are all responsible—the Holy and Eternal God. Our responsibility to Him rests on a strict basis of right; we answer to Him for the use we have or have not made of the powers and faculties which He has given us, and because they are His gifts. It is as "the Maker of all things" that He is "the Judge of all men."[a] The Parable of the Talents[b] is the key to this aspect of human life. Whatever we possess comes from Him, and He expects it to be accounted for. All those to whom men are here responsible are shadows of the Divine Authority; the parent, the teacher, the master, the magistrate, the monarch, nay, in its collective sense, the people. Behind each of these authorities, partial and transient, He stands, the real, the Everlasting Judge of men, to Whom in the last resort all His responsible creatures must give account. There is often something arti-

[a] Confession in the Communion Service. [b] St. Matt. xxv. 14–30.

ficial in the relation which, in this life, makes one man answerable for his conduct to another; St. Paul, for instance, to Felix, or Thrasea[a] to Nero. The relation may have grown up out of a state of things now obsolete; it may be altogether at issue with the relative worth of the two men. But of this artificiality there is no trace whatever in the relation of responsibility in which every soul stands towards Almighty God. All are equally indebted to Him; all are equally dependent on Him; His claims upon and rights over all are equally absolute; and before Him, the Absolute and the All-Holy, each and all of the children of men are as nothing; "the children of men are deceitful upon the weights, they are altogether lighter than vanity itself."[b]

Every man must give account of himself to God. And when we think of what God is, we perceive what this account must be. It will not be rendered to Him by our fears, or our sensitiveness, or our bad memories, or our dulness of conscience, or our false and artificial views of truth and duty. True, we shall give it; and yet He will receive or exact it in utter independence of us. He will read us off, as being what we are, as being all that already He knows us to be. All the veils which hide us from each other, or from ourselves, will drop away before the glance of His Eye. Even now "there is no creature that is not manifest in His sight; for all things are naked and open unto the Eye of Him with Whom we have to do."[c] Even now, all that each of us owes to God; what graces He has given us, what dangers and sufferings He has spared us; He knows, and as yet He only knows. But when we come to give in our account, we shall know too. A flood of light will be poured from His Throne, across the whole course of our

[a] Plin., *Ep.*, vii. 19; viii. 22. Tac., *Ann.*, xvi. 25, 26.
[b] Ps. lxii. 9. [c] Heb. iv. 13.

lives, and into every crevice of our souls and characters. Whatever His verdict upon us may be, our consciences will have to affirm its justice. We shall see ourselves by His Light, as He sees us, as we have never seen ourselves before. We shall know what He meant us to be, what we might have been, what we are, as never before. All the illusions of our present life, all the fabrics of self-satisfaction built up by the kind words of friends or by the insincerities of flatterers, all the atmosphere of twilight which here encompasses our spiritual state, will have rolled away; we shall stand out in the Light before the Eternal Judge and before ourselves. It may be that we have clung to some hope that we live unobserved by Him; that we are beyond the eyesight of the Being of beings. It will be impossible to think thus in the Day of Account. "They say, Tush, the Lord shall not see, neither shall the God of Jacob regard it. Take heed, ye unwise among the people; O ye fools, when will ye understand? He that planted the ear, shall He not hear? or He that made the eye, shall He not see? or He that nurtureth the heathen, it is He that teacheth man knowledge, shall not He punish?"[a]

IV.

It has been said that the strongest of all the motives that can change a man's life, within and without, for his lasting good, is the love of God. If we could love God sincerely for twenty-four hours, we should be other men; we should be capable, spiritually speaking, of almost anything. But, if this be so, the next motive in the order of efficiency is, beyond all doubt, the remembrance of the inevitable last account which we must each of us give

[a] Ps. xciv. 7–10.

before the judgment-seat of Christ. If we could only let that truth sink into our souls and take possession of them; if, as we leave this Sacred Place, instead of saying to a neighbour, "What did you think of the anthem, or of the sermon?" we could silently make up our minds to live henceforth as men who would remember day by day that they have to be judged by a Holy God, we should find that that resolution would do three things for us.

1. It would act as a *check* upon us. It may be that until now we have gone through life like grown-up schoolboys, saying and doing just what we like, with no thought beyond each act, each word. It may be that we pride ourselves on being untrammelled by creeds and scruples; on being, as we say, unconventional; on understanding life to mean chiefly freedom; freedom to think, to say, to do, to be what we like, without let or hindrance. So we bound along the path of earthly existence, with boisterous, irrepressible spirits; as though along that path no mistakes could possibly be made by any bold traveller; as though in the end it led to nowhere in particular. So we bound along, as if engaged in a continuous frolic; as if existence were an immense and inexhaustible joke from beginning to end. And thus we pass from boyhood to manhood, and from ripe manhood to its decline, as men who had eyes, and ears, and thought, and imagination, and sympathy ready for almost anything except the one question, What is there beyond?

And here it is that the thought of the future account does sometimes act as a sudden, solemn check, not merely upon gross sin, but upon aimlessness, frivolity, lack of serious purpose in act and word. A voice comes to us in the dead of night, or in some moment of enforced solitude, and it whispers, "This is all very well, but you

have to give an account to God." So of old said the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem: "Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun: but if a man live many years, and rejoice in them all; yet let him remember the days of darkness. . . . Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment."[a] So said the Beloved Apostle in his island-prison: "And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the Book of Life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works."[b] And if, when a man got up in the morning, he would say to himself solemnly, "I shall have one day to account for what I do and say and think to-day;" and if, ere he lay him down at night, he would say to himself solemnly—out loud, if necessary —"I shall have to account before God for what I have done and said and thought, and failed to think and say and do, to-day," he would find at the end of six months the truth of that saying of St. Augustine, "Nothing has contributed more powerfully to wean me from all that held me down to earth than the thought, constantly dwelt upon, of death and of the last account."[c]

2. This resolution to give thought to the last account would prove also a most useful *stimulus*. If some men regard life as a playground, others treat it as a dormitory. They use it, with all its opportunities, as an opportunity for a long doze. They shrink from its demands upon their exertions; from the repeated calls to do

[a] Eccl. xi. 7–9. [b] Rev. xx. 12. [c] *Conf.*, Bk. vi. [xvi.] 26.

something for God's glory, something for the benefit of others, something for true self-improvement, as if these invitations were merely the importunate voice of an undeserving beggar, or the ravings of a fanatic. They are indolent at twenty; and they say that when they are thirty they will be active men; men of prayer, men of work, men of resolution and self-sacrifice. But thirty comes, and finds them, if I may put it so, still in bed, with just those companions round them who assure them that they will be in time to make a fair use of life, if they are up and doing at forty. The years soon pass, and forty is upon them, and still they are where and what they were. They are still alive to the necessity of some effort, but a man, so they say, is not old at forty; and meanwhile, "a little more sleep, a little more slumber, a little more folding of the hands to sleep."[a] And so they reach fifty, or sixty, when youth has fairly passed, and habits have stiffened around them; and it is too late to rise. If anything can save them, surely it is the overwhelming thought of the account which they must give; the account of all that they have received—strength, intellect, income, time, friends, God's grace, good thoughts and impulses, bright visions of usefulness and happiness, repeated discontent with self—only to be wasted, only to be thrown aside, as if they had never been received at all. "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light!"[b] The light of His Wisdom, streaming on thy soul, from the words written in His Gospel; the light of His Love, shining from the Cross on which He died for thee; the light of His Justice, as, thy yet lingering faith tells thee, He will appear in the clouds of Heaven, coming to judge the quick and the dead;—this may yet save thee, ere it is too late.

[a] Prov. vi. 10. [b] Eph. v. 14.

3. Once more, the resolve to think much of the last account would act like the old Jewish Law; it would be a schoolmaster to bring the soul to the feet of Jesus Christ.[a] For the thought of that account forces us to think over our lives; not once or twice, but often; not superficially, but with a determination, if possible, to see ourselves as we are. To think of the last account often and seriously is to endeavour to anticipate its result, as far as we are ourselves concerned; to act on St. Paul's hint, "If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged."[b] And when we do this, what do we find but weakness, perverseness, determination to go wrong, indifference to God's leading, all that can warrant the acknowledgment, "I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not"?[c] This is about the best that many of us can honestly say for ourselves; and so we are driven to Jesus Christ for pardon and strength, just as were the Jews and Gentiles in the first age of the Church. His Blood washes out the stains which else had forfeited acceptance at the last; with Him there is still plenteous redemption.[d] His Spirit and His Sacraments convey the strength which makes future obedience possible; we can do all things through Christ That strengtheneth us.[e] And so, with His Cross before our eyes and His gracious Presence in our souls, we look forward to our account with trembling joy. It had been impossible to stand before the Throne, unbefriended and alone; but He, in His generous love, has delivered us from our cruel enemies,[f] and has covered us with His robe of righteousness.

[a] Gal. iii. 24. [b] 1 Cor. xi. 31. [c] Rom. vii. 18.
[d] Ps. cxxx. 7. [e] Phil. iv. 13. [f] Ps. xviii. 49.

SERMON XXIV.

HUMAN CRITICISM.

(THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT.)

1 Cor. iv. 3.

With me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment.

THE subject which has engaged our attention on the two first Sundays in Advent, is the account which we must severally render when Christ our Lord comes to judge the quick and the dead. This naturally leads us to think of those judgments about us which are formed here and now by our fellow-creatures, and of the kind of deference which is due to them. And St. Paul meets us very opportunely in the Epistle for to-day,[a] and tells us how he treated those Corinthian Christians who passed judgment upon his character for faithfulness as an Apostle of Christ. St. Paul wished to be thought to be what he was; he was Christ's Apostle, a minister sent by Him and devoted to Him, a steward entrusted with the treasures of His mysteries, whether of truth or grace. "Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God."[b] But office is not everything in an Apostle; besides and beyond office, there is character

[a] The Third Sunday in Advent. [b] 1 Cor. iv. 1.

and motive. "Moreover it is required of stewards, that a man be found faithful."[a] St. Paul knew that there were many persons in Corinth and elsewhere who denied his Apostolical office altogether, because he had not been taught and sent by our Lord Himself during His earthly life, as had been the case with the Twelve. St. Paul was far from being indifferent as to whether men thought rightly or wrongly about his Apostolical credentials; since the question of their genuineness was not a private and personal matter, but a matter of high public interest, affecting the spiritual condition of all those to whom he had to minister. St. Paul, therefore, took a great deal of pains to convince those Corinthians who denied his Apostolic authority that he was a true Apostle, in the same sense as the Twelve. But he is now thinking of men who denied, not the reality of his office, but his faithfulness to its obligations, and with regard to these he says, not "Let a man account of us as faithful," but "With me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment." In short, as to what men might think of his personal character, his general purpose, and ruling motives, he professes his entire indifference; whether in this respect they approved of him or not was, he thought, "a very small thing."

I.

Here let us observe, first, that the judgment of our fellow-creatures upon our acts and characters is, practically speaking, an inevitable accompaniment of human life. For many centuries, long before Christianity was in the world, writers on human nature pointed out that such judgments are, on many accounts, untrustworthy;

[a] 1 Cor. iv. 2.

that they are generally one-sided, defective, partial, tainted with injustice; that they cannot, from the nature of the case, fail upon the whole to do more honour to the judge than to the object of his criticism. We see in the Psalter how many and how mistaken were such judgments in the days of ancient Israel. David is constantly appealing to the just judgment of God, against the judgments of Saul, of Doeg, of Achitophel, of Absalom. Ezra complains to God, again and again, in the hundred and nineteenth Psalm, of the false judgments of the heathen, probably in Babylon. When our Lord came, He said, "Judge not, and ye shall not be judged;"[a] and St. Paul interprets this by the precept, "Judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come."[b] But, as a matter of fact, men go on judging, incessantly, implacably, just as before. The ceaseless activities of each human mind are employed on the human lives and actions around it, as the highest and nearest subject of interest in the world of sense. And the result is a continuous series of judgments or estimates, varying in correctness, in authority, in direction, but being constantly formed, produced, and proclaimed. The family circle, the society of a small town, the county paper, the leading newspaper of a great country, are all of them occupied with the production of these judgments. There is a great difference between the gossip of a small circle and the stately periods of a leading journal, but the moral result may be essentially the same. That men will go on judging each other, must be taken for granted; and the question for a Christian is, How is he to bear himself with reference to these judgments, to this surrounding atmosphere of criticism? Here, at any rate, St. Paul speaks for himself with reference to one small group of critics: "With me

[a] St. Matt. vii. 1. [b] 1 Cor. iv. 5.

it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment."

II.

"A very small thing!" We should do the Apostle a great injustice if we supposed him to be slighting the opinion of his fellow-men on all questions of conduct. Any such indiscriminate depreciation of human judgments, as if they were always and necessarily worthless, is foreign to the spirit, and opposed to the conduct and language, of the Apostle. St. Paul knew that human opinion has a work to do in God's providential government of the world. It acts in the world of thought and conduct as does the policeman in the streets; it is there to keep outward order. It represses, it frowns down all that falls below, or that outrages the debased conventional standard of conduct, upon which a mixed society can be so far agreed as to resolve to uphold it. It is apt to entrench itself, for the sake of convenience, in the sayings of representative authors; and St. Paul appeals to it when he quotes Aratus to the Athenians,[a] or Epimenides about the Cretans;[b] when he quotes Menander, he implies that Corinthian opinion was higher than the moral level of his quotation.[c] To this public opinion, as formed by natural instinct, he appeals when regulating the head-dress of the Corinthian women.[d] And, because its standard of conduct was, so far from being wholly bad, that it was, in some ways, entitled to much respect, he bids Christians take care to "have a good report with them that are without"[e] the Church; in all lawful matters they were to stand well with the opinion

[a] Acts xvii. 28. [b] Tit. i. 12. [c] 1 Cor. xv. 33.
[d] *Ib.* xi. 13, 14. [e] 1 Tim. iii. 7.

of their pagan or Jewish neighbours. The reason for this is found in still deeper features of his teaching. St. Paul not only recognizes, he insists on the fact which secures for all human opinion a certain value; the fact that some truths are as much a part of man's natural outfit as is his imagination or his memory, since they are deposited by the Almighty Creator in the depths of every human soul.

Such a truth is the universal belief in a distinction between right and wrong, whatever right and wrong may turn out to include in detail. Such is the universal apprehension that wrong-doing must be followed by punishment. Such is the general presentiment of a life, indefinitely prolonged, whether for good or evil, after death. Such is the immemorial supposition—to use the word of a great heathen—that there is a Supreme Being, Who is the Author of the distinction between right and wrong, and of the law that wrong is followed by punishment, as well as the Author of Nature. "The invisible things of God from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood from the things that are made, even God's Eternal Power and Divinity."[a] This original deposit of truth may be frittered away by sin or by moral levity, as it was so generally in the heathen world, which, "when it knew God, glorified Him not as God."[b] But enough of it remains to secure to human opinion a certain element, if not a basis, of truth, however this may be overlaid by error. That which remains to man of this original deposit in a state of fallen nature may be but the ruin of a once splendid edifice; but there are ruins which have, before now, suggested new and beautiful creations, even in their last stages of decay.

Still more respect must attach in an Apostle's mind to

[a] Rom. i. 20. [b] *Ib.* 21.

the opinion and judgment of Christians; and in the text he is writing to Christians at Corinth. For Christians have been illuminated by a higher truth than that which is lodged in human nature; the Day-star from on high has visited them.[a] They have, as another Apostle puts it, "an unction from the Holy One,"[b] and they know, or may know if they will, all things that are best worth knowing. "The light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the Face of Jesus Christ"[c] has endowed their consciences with a new set of principles; the Sermon on the Mount has replaced, without contradicting, the earlier lessons of nature and of conscience. St. Paul hears Christ speaking in the Christian; because the principles deposited in the Christian conscience are essential parts of the Mind of Christ, and the language which they inspire is His language. No doubt a great deal else may go to form the language of Christians. Christians are men, and they are sinners. But the consideration that the Light of Heaven has been poured on them, makes it impossible to treat the general judgment of Christians with disrespect. Again and again, the arguments in St. Paul's Epistles are designed to throw his readers back upon the great body of truth of which they are already in possession, upon the inward illumination which they already enjoy.[d] It is impossible to suppose that he would have always treated the judgment of such readers with entire disrespect, as "a very small thing."

III.

Bearing this in mind, we can arrive at some conclusions as to the true province of human judgments.

[a] St. Luke i. 78. [b] 1 St. John ii. 20. [c] 2 Cor. iv. 6.
[d] Rom. v. 3; vi. 9; viii. 28; xiii. 11; 1 Cor. iii. 16; v. 6; vi. 2, 3, 9, 15, 16, 19; viii. 1; xv. 58, etc.

1. They keep order, as I have already said, in the world of thought—a certain sort of order, at any rate. They do not, for instance, go wrong when brought face to face with a great public crime, which, as being such, is patent whether to the natural or the Christian conscience. Take, for instance, such crimes as the massacre of St. Bartholomew, or the massacres of Wexford and Drogheda, or the massacre in Glencoe. At the present day no writer of character, of any persuasion, or in any country, would venture to defend these acts. The world has looked hard at them, and history has spoken. All that can be attempted now, is an apology for the partial misunderstandings or the misguided motives of some who have countenanced them. As to the facts, there is no room for discussion. By the light of the natural conscience of man, by the light of the principles of the Gospel of Christ, they are irrevocably condemned. What man, what Christian, can doubt that this condemnation, thus universally uttered on earth, is a prelude to that which will be heard from Heaven?

2. Again, the common judgment of man does not err when it pronounces upon the more private acts of an individual, supposing them to be well attested. David's adultery and murder of Uriah would be no less condemned by man's natural conscience than it is condemned in David's own inspired language of penitence. The betrayal of our Lord by Judas Iscariot is an act upon the character of which all good men can pronounce a judgment. Even those who do not share the Christian's faith in Christ's Godhead, must see that such treachery towards so gracious and beneficent a Master has about it a peculiar character of malignity. In St. Paul's day, we know, a man need not have been a Christian to condemn Nero's

murder of the boy Britannicus; and, notwithstanding his personal popularity, the treatment of his wives by our own King Henry VIII. has been long since branded by the conscience of Christendom with a note of infamy. How deliberate and irrevocable these judgments are; how they attach themselves to a name, and make it permanently infamous in history, is seen by the futility of the attempts which are made from time to time to reverse them. An ingenious writer of the last generation tried to show that Judas was not so bad, after all. A popular historian of our own day has attempted an apology for Henry Tudor, on the ground that it was necessary to secure the succession to the English crown. The public conscience listens for a moment to these ingenious audacities. It listens; perhaps it is indignant, perhaps it smiles. But it passes on and forgets them.

3. Once more, the judgment of man ventures at times to advance a step further, and to pronounce, with due reserves, upon character. If Scripture had not said that Jeroboam, Ahab, Jehu, were bad men, we know enough about them to anticipate its judgment. Their acts are such as to betray, or rather to stamp, character. There are cases in which so many circumstances combine to create and ratify an impression, that no conclusion but one seems possible. On the other hand, if Scripture had not led the way, and pointed out the habitual levity and irreverence of Saul, would it have been easy for us to have condemned him? Might we not have reserved for him some of the sympathy which we now give so unreservedly to his successor? And who shall attempt to pronounce decisively upon the mixed characters who make up the greater part of history; upon Constantine, the first Christian Emperor, yet the murderer of his son;

upon Charlemagne, that strange compound of incompatible elements of moral earnestness and crime; upon Mohammed, in early life the sincere enthusiast in a crusade against idolatry, and in later years consciously trading upon the fears and ignorance of men; upon Cromwell, in whom so much that is best and worst in man is so subtly intermingled;—who shall pronounce, in numberless cases, equally or more difficult, except with hesitations and qualifications so marked as to deprive the judgment of any real value? The truth is that, in estimating character, the judgment of men can only be certain in rare cases, and seldom or never during the lifetime of the person judged. Posterity may decide where we can only hesitate." In order to estimate character, you require time and distance. You cannot measure a hill while you are standing at its base, or climbing up the side of it; you must move to a distance, and see how it looks on the horizon, against the sky. And thus it is that, in respect of the characters of the great majority of those who have filled a foremost place in history, men are constantly reviewing the verdicts at which they have arrived; constantly modifying, supplementing, retracting, explaining; rehabilitating those who have been condemned, and condemning those who have been unduly praised. But all this shows how uncertain such judgments are; how tentative and partial; how liable to be reversed by a higher Judgment that will be pronounced hereafter.

IV.

And hence we may understand why St. Paul, who does such justice to human public opinion in its own proper sphere, is so indifferent to its conclusions, at Corinth or elsewhere, respecting himself. He has more reasons

than one for treating these conclusions as "a very small thing."

First, the Corinthian judgment about him was like a portrait-painter's sketch at a first sitting. The Corinthians had not had time for learning what a longer acquaintance might have taught them; much less had they had time or opportunity for arriving at the absolute truth of the matter. Secondly, this Corinthian estimate of St. Paul was a strongly biassed one. The Corinthians were largely influenced by some teachers who wished to bring into the Church as much as they could of the old Jewish Law, and who were opposed to the Apostle because he would not allow this. They looked at all that he did with jaundiced eyes; they had made up their minds beforehand that he could not be faithful. No Pelagian would have given St. Augustine a good character; no Puritan would have spoken well of Archbishop Laud; a member of the Jacobin Club in Paris would not have done justice to Louis XVI.; history could hardly leave Sir R. Peel in the hands of the Protectionists; and on the same principle, St. Paul was denounced by the Judaizers at Corinth. What they called a judgment was in truth a formulated prejudice. Thirdly, the Corinthians were passing judgment on a point which they had no real means of investigating. They could decide whether he was or was not a true Apostle, by examining the sources and nature of the Apostolical authority on the one hand, and the events of his life on the other. But how could they decide whether he was or was not a faithful steward of God's mysteries; faithful in intention as well as faithful in act? Single acts, which his Corinthian critics might deem unfaithful, did not show that his life as a whole was an unfaithful life. The question belonged to the inner region of motive, and motive is under the Eye and Jurisdiction of

God alone. What could the Corinthians know of St. Paul's motives? They could only scan the surface of his life. They might, and they did, some of them, call him a deceiver; he knew himself to be true. Fourthly, St. Paul did not, therefore, feel or affect indifference to the question whether he was or was not faithful; he wished it to be tried before a competent tribunal. Just as, in matters of earthly law, he appealed from the biassed sympathies of a provincial magistrate in the memorable words, "I stand at Cæsar's judgment-seat, where I ought to be judged"[a]—so, in matters of the soul, he would go straight to the Fountain of all true justice. "He that judgeth me is the Lord."[b] The knowledge that that judgment was going on day by day, and would be proclaimed hereafter, relieved him of all anxiety as to the opinion which might be formed about him at Corinth. "With me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment."

And what would St. Paul have said about those judgments as to the character of religious men which are so continually being pronounced by a public opinion like that of the modern world? The force and empire of this public opinion arises from the fact that all classes and characters contribute to it; not only the thoughtful, but the inexperienced; not only the servants of Christ, but those who do not serve Him, and who secretly or avowedly reject His claims. But this is fatal to its efficiency as a guide to forming true religious judgments. It is no disparagement to a broom to say that it is not adapted to clean an oil-painting. It has its own function, that of cleaning a wall or a passage, and it discharges this much more efficiently than would be the case if it were a paint-brush. Its merit lies, not in the delicacy of its touch, but

[a] Acts xxv. 10. [b] 1 Cor. iv. 4.

in its rough aggressive force; and this, in its way, is a real merit. But when we see the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven and the sanctities of the Christian life discussed, as they are discussed nowadays, in some organs of public opinion, it is natural to feel as a Royal Academician might be conceived to feel, if a body of well-disposed and earnest persons, armed with brooms, were to burst into the National Gallery with a view to improving Raphael or Turner. The best intentions will not enable a rough instrument to do work for which it is necessarily unfitted; and public opinion, by reason of its massive grandeur and force, is unfitted to deal with the secrets of the Kingdom of Heaven, with the sanctities and exigencies of the conscience of man. As the Apostle says of the natural man, it cannot know the things of the Spirit of God, because they are spiritually discerned.[a] It has an eye for material grandeur, for political grandeur, for social grandeur, for intellectual grandeur; but it either does not recognize moral and spiritual grandeur, or recognizes them only to be conscious of a secret hostility. Certainly, a public opinion which should have combined the petty sectarianisms of the Corinthian Christians with the proud indifference to religious and moral considerations prevailing in the Imperial Court at Rome, would not have commanded the homage of St. Paul. It would have appeared to him "a very small thing," had he been judged, however severely, by such a tribunal.

V.

In conclusion—

1. "With me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment." Two kinds of

[a] 1 Cor. ii. 14.

people may use that language. A very bad man may use it; a man who has steeled himself against all that is good in public opinion; a man who has, to use the Apostle's metaphor, burnt out the sensitive nerve of his conscience,[a] and has secured the dreadful relief which comes with moral insensibility. And a saint like Paul may use that language. He is hidden privily in God's own Presence from the provoking of all men; he is kept secretly in God's tabernacle from the strife of tongues.[b] As the Babel of criticism rises around him, he looks upward to the One Being Whose judgment he values. "In Thee, O Lord, have I put my trust: let me never be put to confusion;"[c] "Thou shalt answer for me, O Lord my God."[d]

Most of us are between the two; and when St. Paul says, "With me it is a very small thing" what people may say of me, we cannot, if we are sincere, profess to follow him. We know that, strictly speaking, what people say of us is not a very small thing to us, but, on the contrary, an important thing. We care a great deal about what they say. If they praise us, we are relieved, gratified; if they are silent, we are anxious; if they abuse and denounce us, we are uncomfortable. We do not pretend to be indifferent to what they say. If we are important people, it may be we even get paragraphs in the newspapers constructed in our honour; if we are unimportant, we get our friends to take our part in the circle in which we move. And our sensitiveness proves a great deal. It shows, first, that we do not really commit ourselves to God. Next, it betrays a knowledge that a discriminating human criticism might have some hard things to say of us. Eli was not indifferent to the words of Samuel, boy as he was; Eli's conscience told him that

[a] 1 Tim. iv. 2. [b] Ps. xxxi. 22. [c] *Ib.* lxxi. 1. [d] *Ib.* xxxviii. 15.

they were true. Nero was not indifferent when his dormant natural sense of right was waking into agony at the near prospect of disgrace and death; as in the early morning he fled disguised from Rome, he was not indifferent to the curses which he heard heaped upon his name by the soldiers in the Prætorian camp;[a] he knew that they were deserved. Conscience, it has been said, makes cowards of us all.[b] Yes, it does when we have left it to take care of itself; but it need not do so for any man who has used his opportunities of making peace with God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

2. For the language of St. Paul may become, and should increasingly become, that of every Christian who lives in the thought of the Day of Judgment, and is preparing, through Christ's grace and mercy, to meet it. Human judgments are not scorned, but they are overlooked, they are forgotten, by men who have set their eyes upon the Divine Judgment. In the firmament of moral truth, as in the natural heavens, the stars vanish from sight at the rising of the sun. We listen to the din of human voices, to the wisdom, to the folly, to the inconsistencies, to the ever-changing notes of human opinion, about men of the day, about our friends, about ourselves, and then the old Psalmist meets us with his descriptive prediction: "The Lord, even the Most Mighty God, hath spoken, and called the world from the rising up of the sun to the going down thereof. Out of Zion hath God appeared in perfect beauty. Our God shall come, and shall not keep silence; there shall go before Him a consuming fire, and a mighty tempest shall be stirred up round about Him. He shall call the heaven from above, and the earth, that He may judge His people."[c]

[a] Sueton., *Ner.*, 48. [b] *Hamlet*, iii. 1. [c] Ps. l. 1–4.

That is the true Final Court of Appeal, which will be opened when Jesus, our Divine Lord, appears in the clouds of Heaven, coming to Judgment. That will be the day of astonishing reversals of earthly judgments, when, in a thousand ways, beyond our powers of imagination to conceive, "the first shall be last, and the last first."[a] At the thought of that day, all our human judgments, bad and good, private and public, confident and hesitating, erroneous and true, dwindle down into their proper insignificance. In the contemplation of that day, we learn more and more clearly that one thing is before all others worth living for; the pardoning and approving verdict of the Eternal Judge. And that verdict is on the whole best secured, if we turn a deaf ear to the voices of men, and unite ourselves more and more closely to Him, Who in life and in death is our Wisdom, and Righteousness, and Sanctification, and Redemption.[b]

[a] St. Matt. xix. 30. [b] 1 Cor. i. 30.

SERMON XXV.

WELCOME TO THE INCARNATE SAVIOUR.

(FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT.)

ISA. XXV. 9.

And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us.

SOME of us may remember, in past days when railroads were as yet unknown or only partially introduced, the sort of approach which a traveller often made to an old continental town. His road lay along a straight, broad, highly raised causeway, fringed on either side by tall poplar trees, which were planted at equal distances from each other. He had to drive, perhaps, some three or four miles through this long avenue; and, at the further extremity of it, he could, from the first, perceive the spires or turrets of the place at which he would halt. If there was variety in the persons whom he met, and in the objects which he could just make out between and beyond the trees, there was persistent monotony in his general purpose, and, consequently, in the direction of his thoughts. From the moment that he enters the avenue, he is thinking of his arrival at the other end of it; of what he will see and say and do when he dismounts; of the quarters, and welcome, and persons, and

objects of interest which await him. All else that he sees is preparatory or subordinate to that final moment, which is, for the present, the limit of his efforts and his expectations.

This may suggest the purpose of a long preparatory season, which leads us up, week by week, with much variety of incidental suggestion, but with steady unity of general aim, to a Great Festival of the Church. Advent is the long, straight avenue which we entered, now three weeks ago.

From the First Day of Advent, and on each succeeding day, the Christmas Festival has been in view. Certainly, at first, our attention was divided between it and Christ's Second Coming; but already, in the Collect for Advent Sunday, the "visit of the Son of God, Jesus Christ, in great humility," is mentioned before "His coming again in His Glorious Majesty to judge the quick and the dead." How to prepare for Christ's Birthday as Christians should, what to do on it, what to hope, what to feel on it when we reach it; to decide this has been in part the business of Advent. And as the brief days have passed, one after another, like the trees on either side in the avenue, we have been drawing nearer and nearer to the bright Day for which Advent should have prepared us, and that Day is already close at hand.

My brethren, these arrangements of the ancient Church of Christ which we retain in our Prayer-book are by no means merely or chiefly valuable on grounds of antiquarian feeling. Undoubtedly a Christian loves to act and speak, so far as he can, as his fathers in the Faith spoke and acted in times gone by; this outward sameness befits the inward union of faith and love which binds us together in the Body of Christ from century to century. But the plan of observing a season of preparation before the

Great Festivals of the Birth and Resurrection of Christ is based on a deep knowledge of human nature. We men are so constituted that we value truths and privileges, even the highest, in proportion to the degree of expectation or longing with which we approach them. The Divine Rule is, "Those that seek Me early shall find Me."[a] The proverb that "no man knows what health is until he has lost it," illustrates a solemn truth of the spiritual and moral world. Those to whom God has from the first given the largest share of religious teaching and opportunities in childhood, are too often conspicuously indifferent to it; the reason being that these privileges fall upon inert, passive souls, in which nothing is roused to anticipate and desire the gifts of Heaven. Well, it is to guard against this danger that seasons like Advent were instituted in bygone ages. Advent is designed to make us enter better than we should without it into the profound significance of the Birthday of the Redeemer of the world. Advent bids us keep our eye upon this mystery of Love and Power for some three or four weeks before we offer to God our yearly thanksgiving for it. Advent stirs up, fosters, trains, develops, in those who make any effort to enter into its meaning, healthy feelings of dissatisfaction with self, and of longing for "the kindness and love of God our Saviour towards man."[b] Advent repeats, on a small scale, God's vast Providential education of the world, through long ages, for the Coming of His Son; it teaches us to learn to say, in the fulness of time, and at the Cradle of our Lord, "Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us."

Certainly, the Prophet Isaiah helps us to anticipate the Christmas Festival, by thus putting into our mouths and hearts the greeting which we should offer it. Isaiah

[a] Prov. viii. 17. [b] Tit. iii. 4.

is here, as so often, a prophet, not merely of future events, but of future states of mind, of God's dealings with His people, and of the way in which His people would meet Him. To what day, what event, does Isaiah refer?

I.

He is thinking, first of all, of Hezekiah's victory over the Assyrian king, Sennacherib. It was no ordinary day which saw the discomfiture of the Assyrian host before the walls of Jerusalem. We can scarcely understand the terror and dismay with which religious Jews watched the growth of those mighty Oriental despotisms which, rising one after another, in the great valley of the Euphrates and the Tigris, aspired to the conquest of the world. The victory of a conqueror like Sennacherib meant the extinction of national life and of personal liberty in the conquered peoples; it meant violent transportation from their homes, separation from their families, with all the penal and degrading accompaniments of complete subjugation. It meant this for the subjugated pagan cities; for Jerusalem it meant much more. The knowledge and worship of God, maintained by institutions of Divine Appointment, was linked to the fortunes of the Jewish State; and the victory of Sennacherib would have involved, not merely political humiliation, but religious darkness. When, then, his armies poured across Asia again and again, "making of a city a heap, of a defenced city a ruin,"[a] and at length appearing before Jerusalem, "when the blast of the terrible ones was as a storm against the wall,"[b] there was dismay in every religious and patriotic soul. It seemed as though a veil or covering, like that which was spread over the holy things in the

[a] Isa. xxv. 2. [b] *Ib.* 4.

Jewish Ritual, was being spread more and more completely over all the nations as the Assyrian monarch advanced. And, in these hours of darkness, all true-hearted men in Jerusalem waited for God. He had delivered them from the Egyptian slavery; He had given them the realm of David and Solomon. He Who had done so much for them, would not desert them now. In His own way, at His own time, He would rebuke the insolent enemy of His Truth and people. And this passionate longing for His intervention quickened the eye and melted the heart of Jerusalem when at last it came.

The destruction of Sennacherib's host was one of those supreme moments in the history of a people which can never be lived over again by posterity. The sense of deliverance was proportioned to the agony which had preceded it. To Isaiah and his contemporaries it was as though a canopy of thick darkness was lifted from the face of the world. It seemed to them that the memories of slaughter and death were entirely swallowed up in the absorbing sense of victory; as though the tears of a city of mourners had been wiped away, as if from Heaven; and the rebuke of God's own people, its fallen credit with surrounding nations, was taken from the earth. And from the heart of Israel there burst forth a welcome proportioned to the longing which had preceded it—

> "Lo, this is our God;
> We have waited for Him:
> He will save us."

My brethren, this recognition of God's Presence in the great turning points of human history is natural to religious minds in all ages. God, of course, is here in quiet times, when all goes smoothly, as if visibly ruled by law. He is not less with Israel in the days of

Solomon's imperial peace, than in the days of Hezekiah's humiliation and agony. But His Presence is brought before the imagination more vividly when much seems to be at stake; when the ordinary human resources of confidence and hope are giving way; when nothing but a sudden, sharp turn in what looks like the destined course of events can avert a fatal catastrophe. This is what was felt by our own ancestors in the days of the Spanish Armada; they recognized the Arm of God in that storm in the English Channel, just as Hezekiah recognized it in the destruction of the Assyrian hosts. This is what was felt by every religious mind in Europe when the power of the First Napoleon was broken, first at Leipsic, and then at Waterloo; for such minds it was the reappearance of all that warranted belief in the moral government of the world. For a score of years men had hoped against hope, and when, at last, the power of the oppressor was shivered—first by Russia, and then by England—men said, "This is not really a result of human agency; this is from on high. This is our God; we have waited for Him: He will save us."

II.

But, beyond the immediate present, Isaiah sees, it may be indistinctly, into a very distant future. The judgment upon Assyria, like that upon Egypt in a previous age, like that upon Babylon afterwards, foreshadowed a Universal Judgment; a judgment upon all the enemies of God. The deliverance of Hezekiah and his people, like the deliverance of the Israel of Moses from the Egyptian Bondage, like the deliverance of the captives in Babylon, foreshadowed a deliverance, final and uni-

versal, at the end of time. The visible Divine Action upon a small scene was a revelation of the principles by which the world is governed, and which will finally be seen to govern it in the widest and most inclusive sense. Thus Isaiah's prediction of the song which would be sung by Israel over the defeat of Sennacherib is a prediction of the song which will be sung by the redeemed when Christ comes to Judgment. In that day, too, Assyria will be judged, but on a much larger scale. "And I beheld," says St. John, "when He had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood. . . . And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; and said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the Face of Him That sitteth on the Throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the Great Day of His wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?"[a]

For that day, too, the Israel of God, whether on earth or in Paradise, has waited constantly. "Wherefore art Thou absent from us so long? why is Thy wrath so hot against the sheep of Thy pasture? O think upon Thy congregation, which Thou hast purchased, and redeemed of old. . . . Arise, O Lord, maintain Thine own cause; remember how the foolish man blasphemeth Thee daily."[b] So prays the Church on earth; and again, St. John tells us what passes beyond the veil. "I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the Word of God, and for the testimony which they held: and they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, Holy and True, dost

[a] Rev. vi. 12–17. [b] Ps. lxxiv. 1, 2, 23.

Thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?"[a] Thus, amid pleadings and intercessions on earth and in heaven, ever ascending round the Throne of God, the centuries pass. The world goes its way; nations and thrones rise and fall; history, as we say, repeats itself. But, meanwhile, the souls who wait on earth and in heaven are not doomed to a perpetual disappointment. The event which they desire is delayed; but it is not finally put off. Every year, every month, every day, brings it nearer. And when at last it bursts upon the world, it will be welcomed by the servants of God, as was the deliverance of Jerusalem from the Assyrian army. When Christ appears, surrounded by the armies of angels, in the clouds of heaven, these happy souls will exclaim, "Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him in the years of time; time is at an end; He will save us."

III.

But between the days of Hezekiah and the Final Judgment there is another event, ever close to the Prophet's thought; the appearance of the Great Deliverer in the midst of human history. He is, in Isaiah's pages, the Virgin-Born, the Bearer of the Awful Name, "Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace."[b] And yet "His Visage is marred more than any man's, and His Form more than the sons of men."[c]

All that belongs to the nearer history of Judah melts away, in the Prophet's vision, into that greater future which belongs to this King Messiah. The Assyrians are

[a] Rev. vi. 9, 10. [b] Isa. ix. 6. [c] *Ib.* lii. 14.

replaced by the spiritual enemies of humanity; the city of David and the Mount Zion become the City of God; the mountain of the Lord of Hosts the Church of the Divine Redeemer.

Here, as so often, the Incarnation of the Eternal Son of God, with its vast and incalculable consequences in the world of souls, is the keynote of Isaiah's deepest thought. Christ our Lord, combining in His single Person the human weakness of Hezekiah with the Divine power which smote Sennacherib, still "destroys in this mountain the face of the covering cast over all peoples;"[a] the veil of darkness which hid out God from the soul of man. He still "makes in this mountain a feast of fat things unto all peoples;"[b] the rich banquet of His most Blessed Body and Blood. He still, and more perfectly, "swallows up death in victory;"[c] the death of sin, in the victory of His own Righteousness, imputed and imparted to sinners by His own free grace. Isaiah, then, is here looking forward to the Christian centuries. "That day"[d] is the day of Christendom, the period which began eighteen centuries since; which will last we know not how much longer yet, and in which we are now living. Isaiah epitomizes the song of Christendom, which ascends, age after age, from its grateful heart to the Divine Redeemer, Whom it now beholds, for Whom mankind has so long waited, and Who indeed can save it.

"Lo, this is our God." Christ is not, for us Christians, merely or chiefly the preacher or herald of a religion, of which another Being, distinct from Himself, is the Object. The Gospel Creed does not run, "There is no God but God, and Christ is His Prophet." The Author and Founder of Christianity is also its Subject and Substance; it is not too much to say that Christ is Christianity. He

[a] Isa. xxv. 7. [b] *Ib.* 6. [c] *Ib.* 8. [d] *Ib.* 9.

is the main Subject, not merely of His Apostles' teaching, but of His own. His perpetual invitations to men, bidding them follow, trust, love, obey, honour Him, would be wrong in a merely human prophet announcing the claims of a Divine Master; they would involve a blasphemy if they did not imply a necessary truth. Who and What He is; what He has done, is doing, and will do; what our relations to Him are, collectively and individually;—these are questions which touch the very heart of Christianity. And when He appears to the soul of man, in its conversion or penitence, the greeting which befits Him is not, "Lo, this is a good man sent from God to teach us some high and forgotten truth," but "Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us."

"Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him." So might the Jews have sung—the children of the promises, the children of the Prophets—as they came to the Redeemer. For more than a thousand years prophecy had been busy with the hope of Israel; making the most of those indistinct predictions which had been given to the first fathers of their race; gradually adding, first here and then there, a new touch, which brought outline and detail out of what had been vague and shapeless; until at last it became, in the hands of an inspired master like Isaiah, almost history. Before Christ came the instructed Jew knew all the main features of that which we believe about Him: His Eternal Subsistence in the Godhead, His Superhuman Birth, the character of His teaching, His humiliation and death, His final triumph. Even around His Cradle elect souls were taught to understand that their longings were satisfied. As Zacharias, in the *Benedictus*, proclaims that God has "raised up a Mighty Salvation for us in the House of His servant David; as He spake by the mouth of His Holy Prophets, which have been

since the world began,"[a] so Mary sings, in the *Magnificat*, that "He remembering His Mercy hath holpen His servant Israel, as He promised to our forefathers, Abraham and His seed, for ever;"[b] and Simeon, in the *Nunc Dimittis*, cries, "Mine eyes have seen Thy Salvation, which Thou hast prepared before the face of all people; to be a Light to lighten the Gentiles, and to be the glory of Thy people Israel."[c] What are these Evangelical hymns but variations of the song, "Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us"?

"Lo, this is our God." So might converts from heathendom have sung; such as were the better spirits who had been trained in the Greek letters and philosophy. As St. Paul said at Athens, the heathen world was busy, after its own fashion, "feeling after God, if haply it might find Him."[d] And in this search it oscillated between, on the one hand, conceptions of the Divine Being so vague and indeterminate that, like all pure speculations, they exerted no influence whatever upon life; and, on the other, a false definiteness, which arrayed the Divinity in forms of beauty and strength, but first compromised His purity by attributing to Him human passions and human vices, and then forgot His Unity in their ever-increasing number and independence. So they went on side by side for ages; the higher philosophy pleading the claims of thought, the popular idolatry endeavouring to satisfy the claims of devotion. But if philosophers attained at times to fine conceptions of the spirituality of God, the heart of the people discovered a deep truth; namely, that the Divine is only brought quite close to man through the human. This was at the root of the mythologies, in which such high honour is paid to heroes and divinities conceived

[a] St. Luke i. 69, 70.
[b] *Ib.* 54, 55.
[c] *Ib.* ii. 30–32.
[d] Acts xvii. 27.

as men; this thought inspired the sculptors upon whose unrivalled works we still gaze with wonder in our national museum. They strove to express consummate veneration for Divinity by clothing it in the most perfect representations of human beauty that they could copy or conceive. They were constantly endeavouring to shape an Ideal of human excellence which might be adequate to express the Divine—which ever haunted, but ever escaped them. Thus did these gifted races, through long centuries of effort and error, wait for their God; and at last He came. He, the Incarnate Son, satisfied their craving for the definite and the tangible by offering a human Form, beheld by thousands; a human Life, the incidents of which were known, and which entered into the substance and stock of human history. And He satisfied their craving for the Divine; since He could dare to say, "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father."[a] Power, as manifested in His miracles; Wisdom, as manifested in His words; above all, Goodness, in which the human conscience could succeed in detecting no flaw that marred its perfectness,—these were attributes of the Incarnate Saviour which struck men like Justin Martyr, or Basil, or Gregory, when, with the Gospels in their hand and the Church before their eyes, they traced the providential guidance of heathen thought. They, too, in spirit sang, "This Christ," they sang, "is our God; long have we waited for Him; He will save us."

"Lo, this is our God." So have sung, in all ages, that multitude of human beings whom a profound sense of moral want has brought to the Feet of the Redeemer. For all men have, in their inmost souls, an unwritten Law of Right, in its eternal contradiction to Wrong; and all know, or may know, by a bitter experience, that in

[a] St. John xiv. 9.

some way or other, in some degree or other, they have violated it. It may be the Revealed Law of the Jew, or the natural Law of the heathen, but the result is the same. No flesh is justified in the sight of the Author of that Law, for by it is the knowledge, without the cure, of sin.[a] So it was with Greek and Jew, with Barbarian and Scythian, with bond and free; so it was with the most favoured and the most miserable of mankind;—each and all were conscious of inward dissatisfaction, in all moments of serious thought, on account of the neglected claims of that Being of beings Who was the Author of the Law of Right. And thus it was that when the Lovingkindness and Love of God towards man appeared, or, as St. Paul means, was so manifested as to strike upon our human senses, it was "not by works of righteousness which we had done, but according to His Mercy"[b] that He saved us. He asked those who came to Him to unite themselves to Him, the Perfect Moral Being, by an act of entire adhesion both of the head and heart and will, by an act of faith. And in return He gave to them, and reckoned as theirs, His own perfect obedience to the Absolute Law of Right, carried forward as it had been to the height of a death of agony. Thus their past unfaithfulness was as though it had not been; it was covered by His faithfulness, which was now theirs. And as He gave them acquittal for the past, so He bestowed vigour and impulse for the future. Before He left the world He instituted rites which should be, to the end of time, the channels of this quickening force which we call grace, and through which, if we will, He makes us that which of ourselves we never could be—faithful soldiers and servants of the Divine King unto our life's end.

Ah! as the generations of men came with their chronic

[a] Rom. iii. 20. [b] Tit. iii. 4, 5.

restlessness, with their ancient and, until now, incurable heartaches to the Feet of the Redeemer, they could not, some of them, but exclaim, "Lo, this is our God!" "We have had other claimants on the homage we yearned to give; gods who were mere intelligence, or mere force, or intelligence and force combined. Here is One Who is Intelligence and Force, but Who is also Goodness; and, as being Goodness, He has not left us in the profound miseries which, as Intelligence, He discerned. He is here among us, as one of ourselves, in the form of a servant, and obedient to the death of the Cross; but not less in vindication of His own necessary Attributes than to relieve our woes. It is for Him that our understandings and hearts and consciences have waited through ages of moral suspense and misery; His Cross and Passion, His Glorious Resurrection and Ascension, are warrants to us that our confidence is not misplaced; He will finish His work, if we will yield ourselves to His guidance. "We have waited for Him: He will save us."

But, as I said at first, in this inspired song we have the true language of the Christian soul which has made good use of Advent-time, and comes on Christmas morning to unite itself to the Author of its new life, in the Sacrament of His Love.

The soul of a poor unlettered man may carry within it the spiritual experience of centuries, and the great and burning thoughts which of old inspired Prophets and Apostles. As we kneel before the Eternal Being, there is little or no difference between us, except such as we may have made by our own use or misuse of the gifts which He has placed within our reach. Seriousness in Advent is the best title to true inward joy at Christmas; and the longings of the past generations of men for the Advent of a Saviour repeat themselves year

by year in the experience of Christians. May He Who, in His enterprising Love, did not abhor the Virgin's womb, and was laid in a manger, deign to enter under the roof of many a soul on Christmas morning, and shed within it abundantly His gifts of Love, and Joy, and Peace!

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